

**POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN
AZERBAIJAN, 1991-95**

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To

Mummy & Papa

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Errors, if any are mine.

Rachana Singh
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AZERBAIJAN

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PREFACE

The radical programmes of *glasnost* and *perestroika* initiated by Mikhail Gorbachev in 1980s opened the proverbial Pandora box and unleashed a plethora of nationalist forces kept in leash since the days of Stalin, which hastened the disintegration of the Union. The tremor of nationalist resurgence was felt across the Union including the Transcaucasus where irredentist aspirations of Azerbaijan and Armenia found the ready flashpoint in the form of Nagorno-Karabakh. These two Transcaucasian republics gained their independence in the shadow of bloody conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh and not only that, their political development, especially that of Azerbaijanis continues to be guided by the events in the above mentioned conflict zone.

The present work is an attempt to dissect the various aspects of political development of Azerbaijan in the early years of the last decade of the 20th century. Given its centrality in the whole theme, it would not be out of place to throw some light on *political development* as a theoretical construct.

Political development as a field of knowledge developed in the late 1950s and early 1960s when a large number of Asian and African countries gained independence and a realization dawned upon the political scientists that the non-Western political processes, even though they were different from the Western political processes, could be successfully studied by them against the socio-economic-cultural background these countries had inherited through the centuries from the West, and under the influence of which they had been operating. It was this quest for an alternative paradigm that encouraged and enriched the corpus of

material on *political development*. Despite the pioneering works produced by some of the best brains of political science, like Lucian pye, Gabriel Almond, James coleman, Leonard Binder, David Apter, Karl Deustch, Rustow, S.M. Lipset, Samuel Huntington and others, the term *political development* lacks a precise and standard definition. As the studies on political development have been undertaken from interdisciplinary perspective, the term has different connotations for different people.

For Lucian pye, the signs of political development could be traced at three different levels—

- i) with respect to the population as a whole
- ii) With respect to the level of governmental and general systemic performance
- iii) With respect to the organization of the polity¹.

His advice was to search for the characteristics of equality, capacity and differentiation in a developing system and determine the degree of their advancement. Lucian Pye and other writers of his ilk were more concerned with identifying the characteristics which distinguished the developing societies of the third world from the developed societies of the West .but by late sixties, the focus in political development studies shifted from the infrastructural studies to an analysis of the will and capacity of political actors and institutions.

Samuel P.Huntington played an important role in liberating political development from socio-economic modernisation. He challenged the idea that

¹ Lucian w.pye and Sidney Verba(ed), political culture and political Development(Princeton:Princeton University press,1965)

political development could be thought in terms of stages or as a unilinear process².

A number of other social scientist, starting with Daniel Lerner and Karl Deutsch³ developed the theory of *social process*. they tried to understand political development from the point of view of the study of social processes, like, industrialization, urbanization, commercialization, literacy expansion etc. This description of political development can be endless as an amazing variety of scholarship exists on the topic.

The researcher intends to incorporate in her present work the paramount themes in different shades of debate on political development following an assimilations approach. The work *Political Developments in Azerbaijan in 1991-95* has been produced keeping in mind this integrationist theoretical framework of political development. This work has been structured into five chapters:-

The first chapter *Historical Background of Political Developments in Azerbaijan*, deals with the historical background of the territory and the problem at hand i.e. political development. Here, the idea is to link the happenings of the distant past to the present.

The second chapter *Emergence of Independent Azerbaijan, 1991-1992* begins from where the first chapter has ended. It throws light on the events leading to the independence of the former Soviet republic and its immediate aftermath.

² Samuel P. Huntington, political development and political decay, *world politics*, xvii, April, 1965

³ Karl Deutsch, social mobilization and political development, *American political science review*, LV, 3, sept, 1961.

Independence and coming into being of a sovereign country is the focus of study here.

The third chapter *Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict and Political Developments in Azerbaijan 1993-94* narrates the story of Nagorno-Karabakh dispute and its impact on the political development of the country in graphic detail. ✓

The fourth chapter *Evolution of Constitutional Democracy in Azerbaijan, 1995* scrutinises that stage in the political development of a country when democratic limbs start taking shape in the form of coming into being of constitutional set up, elections, orderly polity etc.

The findings and suggestions of the researcher have been outlined in the form of conclusion in the last chapter.

Two features of this dissertation need special mention here. First, as the political developments do not happen at a point of time; instead they happen over a period of time, and also as strict compartmentalisation in terms of time period is not possible, each chapter devotes a considerable space to the time span immediately preceding the time period mandated by that chapter; for example, chapter I traces the antiquity of irredentism caused by ethnicity and religion into a far distant time period. Chapter ii includes in its ambit the elaborate description of events from 1988-90 and not only those of 1991-92. Chapter iii does not limit itself only to the time span of 1993-94. It traces the origin of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and in the process a brief sketch of major events during Tsarist and Soviet period is given. As the events on Nagorno-Karabakh front during 1991 had a measure bearing upon the political developments of Azerbaijan in 1993-94, these events and their analysis find a place of pride in this chapter.

Chapter iv looks at the political developments in Azerbaijan till 1995 from a holistic perspective. This chapter summarises the political developments of the newly independent country upto 1995. The purpose of the researcher is to provide an element of continuity and a thread of uniformity running through the whole body of dissertation.

Second, Nagorno-Karabakh is the mid-rib of Azerbaijan as far as the Azerbaijani identity and nationalism is concerned. Any event in Nagorno-Karabakh has its reverberations in the whole Azerbaijani territory. In the light of this importance of the Nagorno-Karabakh, this region finds detailed mention in each chapter. The idea here is not to lose the sight of the epicentre of the Azeri nationalism.

With these two above-mentioned features this dissertation weaves a complete plot.

CHAPTER - I

Historical Background of Political Developments in Azerbaijan

Geopolitics of Transcaucasia kept on changing during past many centuries due to rivalry among different colonial powers. Azerbaijan has been one of the most important components of Transcaucasia which has faced similar situation on several occasions before it became a sovereign state in 1991. Historically, Azerbaijan was an integral part of Iran which was grabbed by Tsarist Russia following two uneven treaties which were treaty of Gulistan and treaty of Turkomanchai signed in 1813 and 1828 respectively. Following these uneven treaties the Tsarist Russia annexed entire Transcaucasian region. These treaties deprived Iran of not only Azerbaijan but also interdicted her from navigation on her own shores along the Caspian Sea. When Bolshevism was on the rise in Russia the Transcaucasian people collaborated with Bolsheviks in anticipation that they would achieve national freedom from Tsarist Empire after the revolution as Bolsheviks had already promised so. However, their dreams could not be materialized after the revolution and all the Transcaucasian states became part of newly formed USSR in December 1922, which proved to be a full stop on the freedom of these states for about next 70 years till the collapse of Soviet Union in 1991.

It is remarkable point to note that a few years before the Soviet collapse the most powerful leader Hyder Aliyev was removed from the

leadership of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan in 1987 by Gorbachev following corruption charges in his administration. After his removal Azerbaijan plunged in to serious crisis after Nagorno-Karabakh conflict with Armenia had become extremely bloody in 1988-89, as a result of which Soviet government took direct control of this region. Despite continued efforts made by the government the situation deteriorated fast. Ultimately, Gorbachev also dismissed Abdurrahman Vazirov, who had succeeded Aliyev. It was followed by another new appointment of Ayaz.N.Mutalibov as new Secretary of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan.

In the meantime, hardliners of the Soviet Communist Party staged *coup d' etat* on August 19, 1991 to oust Gorbachev from power. This attempt was foiled within three days; however, Azerbaijan's communist administration had supported hard-liners during that period. Immediately after the coup attempt failed, in a surprising move Azerbaijanian Parliament declared independence of Azerbaijan on August 30, 1991 and the Communist Party was dissolved. After dissolution of the Party its last secretary Ayaz N. Mutalibov was elected President of Azerbaijan in September 1991. His election was followed by acute crisis emerging from Nagorno-Karabakh dispute. The growing victory of Armenia in disputed area created major political instability in Azerbaijan, as a result of which Mutalibov was forced to resign in March 1992. Another former communist leader Yaqub Mammadov became the new President. However, he could not survive more than a few weeks due to expanding victory of Armenia in Nagorno-Karabakh. This process caused a typical leadership vacuum in

Azerbaijan due to which Mutalibov once again became President for a few days. During this crisis Presidential election was held on June 7th 1992 in which a nationalist leader Abulfaz Elchibey of Popular Front of Azerbaijan was elected President. Elchibey also could not survive Nagorno-Karabakh crisis for a long time due to continuous defeat of Azerbaijan. Above all, he had to face a mutiny in the army and was forced to run away in June 1993 providing an opportunity to deposed communist leader Hyder Aliyev to capture power in Baku. Aliyev fully utilized this opportunity in his favour and became a full-fledged President following new election held in October 1993 for a five-year term. After this election President Aliyev consolidated his power and succeeded in crushing his opponents. Aliyev's rule was marked by some kind of political stability in Azerbaijan mainly due to its becoming full member of Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) in September 1993.

In the field of foreign affairs, Azerbaijan became member of the Partnership of Peace Programme of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). During that period Azerbaijan's Position was strengthened on Nagorno-Karabakh front by recapturing some areas again. However, the old cease-fire agreement had already failed and armed conflict continued in Nagorno-Karabakh till May 1994 when a new cease-fire agreement was signed between Azerbaijan and Armenia.

At the same, time in domestic affairs the government of Aliyev had to face revolt in the army in 1994-1995. However, forces loyal to Aliyev

succeeded in crushing this revolt and established full control over the situation. Following the emergence of such crisis Aliyev dismissed a large number of high level government and military officials including Prime Minister Huseinov who had been charged of supporting mutiny. After establishing full control over this crisis, Aliyev conducted a referendum in 1995 through which the old Soviet constitution was replaced by a new constitution. The new constitution adopted a Presidential form of Government. At the same, time parliamentary elections were held under multi-party system in November 1995 in which the New Azerbaijan Party of Aliyev got majority. Thus the first phase of political developments in Azerbaijan was completed by many important landmarks in the country.

The purpose of this study is to find out the political developments in Azerbaijan during the proposed period, which had been marked by many important phases of a newly independent state. This period was marked by typical dual situation. The first one was the achievement of independence and the second was continuance of civil war, which had emerged from Nagorno-Karabakh disputes between Azerbaijan and Armenia.

The dispute had already created multiple socio-economic and political problems before Azerbaijan became an independent nation. This is why, during the period of this study, every political development in Azerbaijan was influenced by Nagorno-Karabakh dispute and civil war. It had created an acute ethnic unrest coupled by Islamic resurgence. Behind this development Azerbaijan's past history played an important role as it is

Repeated

obvious from the Tsarist annexation of Transcaucasia. In this regard, it is well known fact that originally Azerbaijan was an integral part of Iran. That is why, this external factor always influenced most of the socio-political developments in Azerbaijan particularly after the collapse of Soviet Union one of the most dangerous events was the advent of Elchibey in Azerbaijanian politics who had become President of the country. He was an Islamic fundamentalist. During his tenure, though for a short period it was felt that Azerbaijan would also follow the path of fundamentalist Iran. However, he failed in his mission due to his sudden removal from the power. After seventy-four years of long Soviet rule, it was very difficult for a historically traditional state like Azerbaijan to evolve a new democratic political system in an extremely turbulent situation. Under these circumstances Azerbaijan did come out with greater successes. It succeeded in evolving a political system based on constitutional democracy with multi-party system as its main pillar.

However if we go a little more in the past it will appear that this region had become a battleground of different conflicting ideas from religious to political in nature. In ancient and medieval period there had been struggle for supremacy of religious ideas while the modern period became a centre of colonial rivalry for the takeover of its land, endowed with rich natural resources in order to create a base for world domination. So far as Russian adventure in this area is concerned it all began with Peter the Great's policy of 'eastward' expansion. As mentioned earlier, the Treaty of Gulistan and the Treaty of Turkmanchai which, had

changed the face of this region , cast its shadow over a long time to come in the future.

The Russia attacked Persia in 1813, with Persia in decline under Shah Fath Ali. The Azeri Khanate was ceded to the Russia by Tsar Alexander I, bringing the northern part of Azerbaijan¹ to the European sphere of influence. In the treaty of Gulistan Persia and Russia agreed that Azerbaijan would be divided along the Araz River with Russian Azerbaijan north of the river and Iranian Azerbaijan to the south.

In 1826 Persia again challenged Russian hold over the region², but was defeated in the decisive battle of Ganja, and soon Russian troops seized Tabriz. The arrangements that define today's borders were made in 1828 in the treaty of Turkmanchai, between Russia and Persia. The Azeri land south of the Araz River remained part of Persia and now integrated the Islamic Republic of Iran. During 9th and 10th century, Russian influence over daily life in Azerbaijan was less pervasive than that of indigenous religious and political elites and the cultural and intellectual influences of Persia and Turkey³. During most of the 19th century the Russian Empire extracted commodities from Azerbaijan and invested little in the economy. However, the exploitation of oil in Azerbaijan at the end

¹ Hugh Seton-Watson, *The Russian Empire-1801-1917*(Oxford:Clarendon press,1967),p.59

² See Muriel Takin, *Russia and Iran , 1780-1828*(Minneapolis:University of Minnesota Press,1980)

³ Lord Kinross, *The Ottoman Centuries: The Rise and Fall of the Turkish Empire* (New York: Morrow Quill,1977),pp.276-77

of the nineteenth century brought an influx of Russians into Baku, increasing Russian influence and expanding the local economy. Although ethnic Russians came to dominate the oil business and government administration in the late 1880s, many Azeris became prominent in particular sectors of oil production, such as oil transport on the Caspian Sea. Armenians also became important as merchants and local officials of the Russian monarchy.⁴

The population of Baku increased from about 13,000 in the 1860s to 112,000 in 1897 and 215,000 in 1913, making Baku the largest city in the Caucasus region. At this point, more than one-third of Baku's population consisted of ethnic Russians. In 1905 social tensions erupted in riots and other forms of death and destruction as Azeris and Armenians struggled for local control and Azeris resisted Russian sovereignty.⁵

The oil boom, transformed the capital of the northern part of Azerbaijan, Baku, into a cosmopolitan industrial centre, with a large proletariat population living and working in appalling conditions under Russian control. As such, the city was a respective target for both nationalist groups and the early Bolshevik movement.

⁴ John F. Baddeley, *The Russian Conquest of the Caucasus 1908* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1969), pp23-24

⁵ Anahide Ter Minassian, "The Revolution of 1905 in Transcaucasia", *Armenian Review*, Vol.42, No.2 (Summer, 1989), p.14

Activists, including the young Joseph Stalin, cut their political teeth fomenting discontent among Baku oil workers.⁶

A leftist party calling itself Himmat (Courage), composed mainly of Azeri intellectuals, was formed in 1904 to champion Azeri culture and language against Tsarist and other foreign influences. A small social Democratic Party (which later split into Bolshevik and Menshevik factions) also existed, but that party was largely dominated by Russians and Armenians. Some members of Himmat broke away and formed the Musavat (Equality Party) in 1912. This organisation aimed at establishing an independent Azeri state, and its progressive and nationalist slogans gained wide appeal. Himmat's Marxist colouration⁷ involved it in wider ideological squabbles in the period leading up to the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution in Russia. After several further splits, the remaining part of Himmat was later absorbed into the Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik).

Oil wealth precipitated a prolonged power struggle in Baku .Following the 1917 revolution⁸, the nationalists initially seized control and enlisted the support of the British, who allegedly authorized the execution in 1918, of 26 leading local communist

⁶ *ibid.*

⁷ Ronald G. Suny, "The Revenge of the Past: Socialism and Ethnic Conflict In Transcaucasia", *New Left Review*, no. 184 (November-december 1990), p. 16

⁸ See n. 4.

(the Baku Commissars), in an unsuccessful attempt to destroy the Bolshevik power base in the oil industry.

After the Bolshevik revolution, a mainly Russian and Armenian grouping of Baku Bolshevik declared a Marxist Republic in Azerbaijan⁹. Muslim nationalists separately declared the establishment of the Azerbaijan people's Democratic Republic in May 1918 and formed the "Army of Islam", with substantial help from the Ottoman Turkish Army¹⁰ to defeat the Bolsheviks in Baku. The Army of Islam marched into the capital in September 1918. Meeting little resistance in the city, the new Azeri government, dominated by the Musavat, moved into its capital. Azerbaijan was occupied by Ottoman Turkish troops until the end of World War I in November 1918. British forces then replaced the defeated Turks and remained in Azerbaijan for most of that country's brief period of independence.

Facing imminent subjugation by the Red Army, Azerbaijan attempted to negotiate a union with Persia, but this effort was mooted when the Red Army entered Azerbaijan in April 1920 to fight British forces which had occupied Baku. The Red Army met little resistance from Azeri forces because the Azeris were heavily involved in suppressing separatism among the Armenians that

⁹ See n.7.

¹⁰ See n.3.

formed a majority in the Nagorno Karabakh area of south-central Azerbaijan¹¹. In September 1920, Azerbaijan signed a Treaty with Russia unifying its military forces, economy, and foreign trade with those of Russia, although the fiction of Azeri political independence was maintained.

After Russian Revolution followed by civil war, the borders and formal status of Azerbaijan underwent a period of change and uncertainty in the 1920s and 1930s and then they remained stable through the end of the Soviet period in 1991.

In late 1921, the Bolshevik Russia declared the formation of Transcaucasian Federated Republic, composed of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, which in 1922 became part of the newly proclaimed Soviet Union as the Transcaucasian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic (TSFSR)¹². In this new large republic, the three sub-units ceded their nominal power over foreign policy, finances, trade, transportation and other areas of the unwieldy and artificial authority of the TSFSR. In 1936 the new "Stalin Constitution" abolished the TSFSR and the three constituent parts were proclaimed separate Soviet republics.

¹¹ Patric Donabedian, "The History of Karabakh from Antiquity to the 20th Century", in Levon Chorbaijian, Patric Donabedian, and Claude Mutafian, eds., *The Caucasian Knot: The History and Geopolitics of Nagorno-Karabakh* (London: Zed Books, 1994), pp.81-82

¹² *ibid.*

In mid-1920 the Red Army occupied Nakhichevan, an Azeri enclave between Armenia and North-western Iran. The Red Army declared Nakhichevan a Soviet Socialist Republic having close ties with Azerbaijan. In early 1921, a referendum confirmed that most of the population of the enclave wanted to be included in Azerbaijan. Turkey also supported this solution. Nakhichevan's close ties with Azerbaijan were confirmed by the Russo-Turkish Treaty of Moscow and the Treaty of Kars among the three Trans-Caucasian states.

Lenin and his successor, Joseph V. Stalin, assigned pacification of Trans-Caucasia and delineation of borders¹³ in the region to the Caucasian Bureau of the Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik). In 1924 the bureau formally designated Nakhichevan an autonomous republic of Azerbaijan with wide local powers.

The first Communist President of Azerbaijan was the activist and writer Nariman Narimanov who became a popular leader. The 1930's brought an intensification of the purges under Stalin's paranoia. The crack-down on all forms of religion was particularly hard targeting not only the people but also the buildings. During this period the both magnificent Alexander Nevski Cathedral and the holiest islamic site in Baku, the Bibi Heibat Shrine, were

¹³ Victor Porkhomovsky, "Historical Origin of Inter-Ethnic Conflicts in Central Asia and Transcaucasia", in Vitaly V. Naumkin, ed., *Central Asia and Transcaucasia: Ethnicity and Conflict* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1994), p.25

demolished.¹⁴ In the meantime when Soviet Union was attacked by Hitler in June 1941, the political situation became very sensitive in the Transcaucasian region. The new situation forced Soviet Union to sign an armistice over Iran with allied powers i.e., America, Britain and France which allowed these powers to take over Iran in order to check Hitler from attacking Soviet Union through Transcaucasia as Iran under Reza Shah's rule had become very friendly with Hitler. However after the end of World War Two allied forces immediately withdrew their army from Iran while Soviet Union refused to do so. The reason behind this move was completely ideological because there was very strong presence of communist movement in Iranian Azerbaijan where the Soviet forces had been heavily deployed. It had its direct impact on Russian Azerbaijan from where the ideological support was coming to Iranian Azerbaijan. Later on international situation forced the Soviet Union to withdraw its forces from Iran which marked the end of Soviet ideological offensive in Iranian Azerbaijan. By this time political situation in Russian Azerbaijan had been completely stabilized. Therefore Soviet withdrawal from Iranian Azerbaijan could not put any adverse impact on its counterpart in Russia.

¹⁴ Chantal Lemerrier-Quelquejay, "Islam and Identity in Azerbaijan", *Central Asian Survey*, Vol.3, No.2 (1984), p.31.

During Stalin's regime, Azerbaijan suffered¹⁵, as did other Soviet republics, from forced collectivization and far-reaching purges. Yet during the same period, Azerbaijan also achieved significant gains in Industrialization and literacy levels that were impressive in comparison with those of the other Muslim states of the Middle East at that time.

After Stalin, Moscow's intrusions were less sweeping but nonetheless authoritarian¹⁶. In 1959 Nikita S. Khrushchev, First Secretary to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), moved to purge leaders of the Azeri Communist Party (ACP) because of corruption and nationalist tendencies¹⁷. Leonid I. Brezhnev, Khrushchev's successor, also removed ACP leaders for nationalist leanings, naming Heydar Aliyev in 1969 as the new ACP leader.

Heydar Aliyev emerged as the most influential Azeri politician during the post war years. He was, successively head of the Azeri KGB (1967), head of the republic itself (1969), and then a full member of the Soviet Politburo (1982) and first deputy chairman of the USSR Council of Ministers. However Mikhail S. Gorbachev

¹⁵ For details see Robert Rossow, "The Battle of Azerbaijan,1946", *The Middle East Journal*,Vol.10(Winter 1956),pp17-32

¹⁶ Yaroslav Bilinsky, "The Soviet Education Laws of 1958-59 and Soviet Nationalities Policies," *Soviet Studies* ,vol.14,No.2, (October 1962),pp138-157

¹⁷ Yuri Slezkine, "The USSR as a Comunal Apartment,or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism", in Geoff Eley and Ronald G. Suny ,eds., *Becoming National* (New York:Oxford University Press,1996),p228.

removed Aliyev in 1978, ostensibly for health reasons, although later Aliyev was accused of corruption.

As the Soviet Union started to break up towards the end of the 1980s, it was the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh¹⁸ that proved decisive in Azerbaijan's political development. Popular discontent of the progress of the war led to the marginalization of the Communist Party in Azerbaijan and the rise of the nationalist popular front during the late 1980s.¹⁹

Encouraged by the mood of Perestroika and Glasnost, in February 1988 the Nagorno-Karabakh Regional assembly formally requested that the region be transferred to neighbouring Armenia. Moscow rejected this request. By the end of February 1988, the situation became worse with incidents between Armenians and Azeris in Sumgait. Soviet troops were called to restore order. In November 1988 violence once again broke out in several cities.

In the fall of 1989, the nationalist opposition, Azeri popular front (APF) led a wave of protest strikes expressing growing political opposition to Azeri Communist Party rule. Under this pressure, the ACP authorities bowed to opposition calls to legalize the APF and proclaim Azeri Sovereignty.

¹⁸ Caroline Cox and John Eibner, *Ethnic Cleansing in Progress: War in Nagorno – Karabakh* (London: Institute for Religious Minorities in the Islamic World, 1993), p.25

¹⁹ Michael P. Croissant, *The Armenian-Azerbaijan Conflict: cause and Implications* (London: Praeger, 1998), p.34

In September 1989, the Azeri Supreme Court passed a resolution of Sovereignty. Among the first such resolutions in the Soviet republics, the resolution proclaimed Azerbaijan's Sovereignty over its land, water, and natural resources and its right to secede from the Soviet Union following a popular referendum. The Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, the legislative body of the Soviet Union, declared this resolution invalid in November 1989.

Another manifestation of nationalist fervour²⁰ occurred at the end of 1989, when Azeris rioted along the Iranian border, destroying border checkpoints and crossing into Iranian provinces that had Azeri majorities. Azeri intellectuals also appealed to the Politburo of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union for relaxation of Border controls between Soviet and Iranian Azerbaijan, comparing the "tragic" separation of the Azeri nation to the divisions of Korea and Vietnam.

Thanks to the twin policy of Glasnost and Perestroika, adopted by Gorbachev in 1980s, nationalist forces came to the fore by 1989 as never before. The issue of Nagorno-Karabakh provided the rallying ground for Azeri nationalists. The animosity with Armenians reached a crescendo. Taking advantage of the weakening resolve of the Soviet Union to keep its flock together a

²⁰ Shireen T Hunter, *The Transcaucasus in Transition: Nation-Building and Conflict*(Washington,DC:Center for Strategic and International Studies,1994),p.3

variety of separatist forces took centre stage in Azerbaijan by late 1980s finally leading to the emergence of independent Azerbaijan. This birth of new nation forms the theme of the next chapter focusing on the developments during 1991-92.

CHAPTER - II

Emergence of Independent Azerbaijan 1991-92

A series of cascading events took place in Azerbaijan, as in other parts of the then Soviet Union, in late 1980s and early 90s leading to the emergence of independent Azerbaijan. The push towards an independent Azerbaijan came from the autonomy that spread to most parts of the Soviet Union under Gorbachev's liberalised regime in the late 1980s. When Gorbachev launched *Perestroika* in 1985, the republics of Transcaucasia were mired in economic stagnation and corruption of the local authorities. The hard-liners in the communist party were suspicious of Gorbachev's intentions because his reform measures might jeopardise great privileges which *nomenklatura* enjoyed during previous decades. However, ordinary people in the region greeted the reforms with enthusiasm. They associated themselves with the restructuring in the hopes for the improvement of living standards, political atmosphere and national autonomy. Notwithstanding the popular support, because of the resistance of the conservatives, changes in Transcaucasia occurred slowly and the region lagged behind the renovation process in Moscow. Reluctance of the Party elites to follow Gorbachev's reforms from above increased the tendencies for liberalisation from below. A number of 'informal' organisations

were founded in Transcaucasia to promote the new political course. Due to the favourable political environment created by *glasnost*, the old dissident groups came out of underground and joined the legal political activity. Whereas in Russia, the informal groups were aimed to encourage political and economic reforms in the USSR, these organisations had an additional task in the form of “national awakening” in Transcaucasus.

The Spark of Azeri Nationalism During Late 1980s

The first spark of national awakening appeared in Transcaucasus in the ecological field first. Examples are aplenty. Informal organisations in Azerbaijan demanded from the authorities to close down the aluminium and chemical plants in sumgait, one of the most polluted Soviet cities. A series of protest actions against the irresponsible projects in Armenia took place in 1987 in Yerevan.¹ In Georgia, the rise of nationalism was facilitated by a strong campaign against the construction of the Transcaucasian railroad across the main Caucasian Range. The railroad might cause avalanches, landslides and a pollution of the river of Aragvi, the main source of the drinking water of Tbilisi. The protest movement was initiated by the Helsinki Union of Georgia led by a prominent dissident Zviad Gamsakhurdia.

¹ Audrey L. Alstadt “Nagorno-Karabakh: The Apple of Discord in the Azerbaijan SSR” , *Central Asian Survey*, 7, No. 4 (1988).

However, the most striking example of the role of ecological movement in national awakening was the mass protest in autumn 1988, in Azerbaijan against the self-willed construction of the aluminium plant by Armenia in the place of Topkhana in Nagorno-Karabakh. The project envisaged clearing of a historical forest in Topkhana and destruction of a national relic, the Topkhana cave, which had been taken under the state protection. By the moment when the news reached Baku, the Armenians had already wiped out a significant area of forestry, including many species of unique plants and rare insects entered in the 'Red Book'.

The consequences of the Topkhana plans had been profound for the Azeri national rebirth. During the unprecedented three-week continuous meeting in Baku in 17 November-5 December, 1988, the demand to stop the construction had unexpectedly developed into a political agitation. People protested against the Armenian claims to Nagorno-Karabakh, and demanded to grant the Azeris in Armenia equal autonomy and to expand the Sovereignty of Azerbaijan within the union. They criticised the republican authorities for the failure to defend national interests and to promote economic liberalisation and democratisation.² As soon as the demand of autonomy reached Armenia, nearly 200,000 Azeris were forcibly expelled from there³. The arrival of the refugees to Baku radicalised the

² On the relationship between the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the rise of Azeri nationalism, see, Mark Saroyan, "The Karabakh Syndrome and Azeri Politics", *Problems of Communism*, 39(sept-oct, 1990)

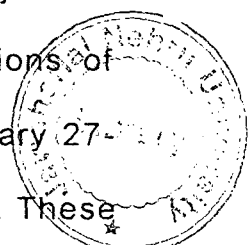
³ *ibid.*

Movement. Fearing a complete loss of control of the situation in Baku, the republican leaders appealed to Moscow for the introduction of the Soviet troops to the city. The violent dispersal of the peaceful meeting by the military on 5th December had shocked the Azeris and had profound effect on the rise of nationalism in Azerbaijan. Toward the end of 1988, large groups of Azerbaijanis began to openly express support for Azerbaijani-based issues, such as the use of the Azerbaijani language in the republic and concern for co-ethnics abroad, and challenged the legitimacy of Soviet rule in the republic. These topics were no longer the sole domain of intellectual circles, and demonstrations and protests began to draw large crowds from diverse socio-economic groups in Azerbaijan. From the second half of 1988, much of this activity was conducted under the leadership of the popular Front of Azerbaijan (APF).⁴ The organisation was formed as an umbrella group uniting individuals and groups of different political orientations under an agenda that: opposed any change in the republic's borders (chiefly the province of Nagorno-Karabakh); was concerned for Azerbaijanis living outside the republic; and supported the expansion of *glasnost* and *Perestroika* and greater use of the Azerbaijani language in the republic. The PFA operated in a decentralised fashion, with branches forming through out Soviet Azerbaijan.

⁴ The first public references to the organisation appeared on Radio Baku on November 23, 1988. For a detailed analysis, see *Baku Domestic Service in Azerbaijan*, November 28, 1988 (FBIS-SOV-88-230)

Nagorno-Karabakh:Fodder for the Fire

At this point it is not to be forgotten that One of the most important catalysts, for the national movement's transformation into a mass movement in Azerbaijan was Armenia's drive to control the province of Nagorno-Karabakh. From mid-1987 throughout 1988, ethnic Armenian delegations from Nagorno-Karabakh visited Moscow with the aim of convincing officials to transfer jurisdiction over the province to Armenia. In February 1988, two Azerbaijanis were killed in direct clashes between Armenians and Azerbaijanis in Nagorno-Karabakh. This incident triggered intense eruptions of violence in the town of Sumgait, near Baku. During February 27-29th, twenty-six Armenians and Six Azerbaijanis were killed. These incidents led to the mass flight of Azerbaijanis from Armenia, and Armenians from Azerbaijan, creating immense refugee problems on both sides. The refugee situation made political action seem urgent. The failure of Baku to effectively solve the refugee problems evoked public criticism, and many Azerbaijanis joined the opposition to the Communist regime in Baku, and reinforced their identification as Azerbaijanis and their desire for self-rule. The sumgait violence was a turning point in the self-identification of many Armenians throughout the region. However, many Azerbaijanis did not cast blame on themselves for the violence perpetrated against Armenians at Sumgait and related the



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Azerbaijani part in the events as the work of local hoodlums. This round of violence did not trigger much soul searching or significantly affect Azerbaijani collective identity in this period. Throughout February 1988, large demonstrations in support of the Karabakh Armenians' drive to separate from Azerbaijan were held in Yerevan. In March 1988, Gorbachev formed a government commission to investigate the problem and make recommendations about the future status of Nagorno-Karabakh. In May 1988, the head of the Communist Parties of Azerbaijan and Armenia were dismissed, allegedly due to their failure to contain the conflict.

Azerbaijani intellectuals responded to this perceived threat to Azerbaijani control of Nagorno-Karabakh. In February 1988, the poet Bakhtiyar Vahabzade and historian Suleiman Aliyarov co-authored an "open letter" rebutting Armenian claims to the disputed province.⁵ This letter, which went far beyond confronting the Armenian claims, was also an important treatise on Azerbaijani identity. The authors presented their view that the Azerbaijanis and Karabakh Armenians both emanate from the same ethnic stock: the Caucasian Albanians.⁶ They linked this ancient people and the contemporary Azerbaijanis. They drew a connection between the contemporary threat to their lands from Armenia and the 1828 division of Azerbaijan between Russia and Iran.

⁵ Audrey L. Altstadt, *Journal of the Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs*, Vol.9, No.2 (July 1988), pp.429-434.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p.432.

As far as the role of the ex-Soviet Union in this game is concerned, even prior to independence, the steady disintegration of the USSR had unleashed three dynamics that greatly shaped the course of the coming events. These included a rapid rise in volatile ethno-nationalist sentiments in Azerbaijan, Armenia, and the Azeri region of Nagorno-Karabakh, whose population was made up mostly of ethnic Armenians; a concomitant and steady rise in the appeal of the newly formed popular Front Party (PF), around which many Azeris, especially in the Middle Classes and from intellectual circles, began to gather; and a relatively large scale transfer of arms and ammunition from departing, often undisciplined Soviet troops to civilians. Although in certain circumstances the combination of ethno-nationalism, a populist Political Party, and armed private militias can potentially work to strengthen the process of state building, as in Serbia, for example – in Azerbaijan the mix proved quite inimical to the consolidation of any form of central authority.

It is important to take note of the fact the Nagorno –Karabakh conflict was a product of, and in turn a catalyst for, the intensification of ethno-nationalist feelings on the part of all involved⁷. For Azeris, the Human drama unfolding in Karabakh crystallized, albeit in a raw and unrefined form, a strong sense of

⁷ See n.2

national and ideological identity which for many decades had not been allowed to evolve. The rapid demise of the Soviet system only deepened the compelling nature of the long dormant identity. In January 1989, the Soviet authorities removed Nagorno-Karabakh from Azerbaijan's control, and placed it under direct rule of Moscow. Most Azerbaijanis perceived Moscow as being pro-Armenian, so this strengthened their desire to distance themselves from Moscow.

The attack on Baku and indiscriminate killing of Azeri civilians by Soviet troops on January 20, 1990 – ostensibly to protect the city's remaining Armenians from rioting mobs-only reinforced the nativist, emergent nationalism sweeping across the Republic. By the time, independence came, "President" Mutalibov had already exhausted his legitimacy in the popular eye long ago, and his championing of Azeri nationalist interests was bought by few outside his immediate circle. During the period of *glasnost*, many groups in the Soviet Union made conflicting claims about the borders they shared. In all these conflicts, Moscow had adopted a Policy in this period not to change these borders between republics. The exception was Nagorno-Karabakh, where Moscow was willing to consider a change of jurisdiction. Azerbaijanis were incensed that only with regard to "their territory" was Moscow willing to make a change. Azerbaijanis perceived the Moscow media and intellectual community as being completely biased against them in

this conflict. They saw themselves as the victims in this conflict. They felt that Moscow's media generally portrayed them as threatening Muslims, while representing the Armenians as the victims. This perception of bias contributed to the Azerbaijani drive for self-rule, and further weakened the limited identity ties to Moscow. Describing these feelings, Bakhtiyar Vahabzade wrote:

I can not imagine how long we will have to stand for the biased position of the central newspapers. How long will they write that we are wrong, when we are right, and they are right when they are wrong, and how long will they remain silent about our just demands?⁸

As part of the cultural and political trend of distancing themselves from Moscow, many Azerbaijanis decided to drop the Russian name endings, such as "-OV" and "-sky" from their surnames, and replace them with more traditional Azerbaijani endings, such as "-li", "-lu", and "-oglu". In an article in *Azerbaijan Qenjleri*, Logman Nasibzade of the Azerbaijan Pedagogical Institute in Baku expressed support for this trend.⁹

The threat to Azerbaijani territorial integrity posed by the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict influenced national unity in Soviet Azerbaijan in two ways. First, Azerbaijanis from different sectors of the population many of whom had relatives in Nagorno-Karabakh

⁸ Quoted in Brenda Shaffer, *Borders and Brethren: Iran and the challenge of Azerbaijani Identity* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002), p. 129.

⁹ Ibid, p. 130.

and in Armenia who was directly affected by the strife, opposed any change in the status of the province and condemned Moscow's handling of the conflict.

Second, since most of the population felt that the communist leadership of the Republic blundered in the Nagorno-Karabakh issue and had failed to maintain control over the disputed province, many joined the opposition forces at this time. The intensification of the struggle over Nagorno-Karabakh also persuaded many Azerbaijanis to participate in political demonstrations and join Azerbaijani national political movement. This activity built on the attachment and the awareness of Azerbaijani identity, which existed prior to this perceived threat.¹⁰

In 1989, the Popular Front –led opposition in Azerbaijan became more aggressive in challenging the Communist-associated leadership of the republic and demanded that Baku retain control over Nagorno-Karabakh. At this time, it began to articulate the goal of Sovereignty for Azerbaijan. The movement promoted the preservation of Azerbaijan culture and language and voiced concern for Azerbaijanis living outside the republic, including those in Iran. In January and February 1989, PFA activists began circulating a draft of their Political Platform. In its final version, the

¹⁰ For a detailed analysis of all aspects related to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, See Michael P. Croissant, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict: Causes and Implications* (London: Praeger, 1998)

platform stated that the name of the people of Azerbaijan is the "Azerbaijani Turks".¹¹ Stressing the Turkish component of Azerbaijani identity. It refrained from calling for the independence of Azerbaijan, advocating instead for "Sovereignty within the USSR" yet demanding representation in the United Nations. Stressing its belief that Azerbaijani identity is tied to the Middle East, and the need to develop connections in particular with the peoples who historically formed the cultural region of the Near and Middle East, "PFA programme" supported decisive steps towards the development of understanding and cooperation with Islam. The programme also emphasized the need to strengthen relations with the Azerbaijanis in Iran,¹² calling for the "abolition of all political barriers to the development of cultural and economic ties with southern Azerbaijan."

An interesting and curious turn came in the approach of the republican communist leadership by late 80s. The Communist leadership in Azerbaijan, which was affected by Moscow's progressive loss of central control and evidently hoped to preempt the growing support for the PFA, took the lead from the opposition and began to respond in 1989 to demands for increased local Azerbaijani control over the republic and the promotion of

¹¹ Programme of the People's Front of Azerbaijan .

¹² See n.6, for this aspect of Azerbaijani identity.

Azerbaijani culture.¹³ For instance, the official media in Baku announced in March 1989 that "taking into consideration the wish of the people, the Azerbaijan SSR supreme Soviet Presidium has returned the names of Zhdanov Town and Zhdanov Rayon back to Beylagan Town and Beylagan Rayon."¹⁴ In December 1989, the city of Kirovabad reverted to its ancient name, Ganja.

An interesting change appeared in the symbols used at the protests that took place. Throughout fall 1989, the flag of the Azerbaijan SSR, which had been flown at protests in the preceding year, was replaced by the Tricolour Flag of the short-lived Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, linking the demonstrators to the independent, pre-Soviet state from 1918-20.

Yet, the PFA's attitude toward full independence was ambiguous throughout the intense political activity of fall 1989. In its formal statements, the PFA consistently claimed that its goal was to achieve Sovereignty within the framework of the Soviet Union. Yet they described "Sovereignty" as including the right to issue passports, conclude international treaties, and send representatives to international organisation.¹⁵ Moscow's failure to acquiesce to the Azerbaijani demands for the return of control over Nagorno-Karabakh prompted the PFA activists to expand their

¹³ Audrey L. Altstadt, *The Azerbaijani Turks: Power and Identity under Russian Rule*, (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1992), pp204-219

¹⁴ Baku Domestic Service in Azerbaijan, March 18, 1989 (FBIS-SOV-89-057).

¹⁵ Programme of the People's Front of Azerbaijan

concept of Sovereignty to include the right to vote any legislation emanating from the Soviet capital.

On September 10th, 1989, the PFA announced that it would halt the strikes and protests after an agreement had been reached with the republic's leadership. It included formal recognition of the movement and the convening of a parliamentary session to discuss the expansion of the republic's political and economic Sovereignty.

On September 23, the Parliament of Soviet Azerbaijan formally declared the republic "Sovereign within the USSR". The government, though, delayed the publication of the content of the declaration of Sovereignty until October 5th. The formal statement asserted that "the competence of Azerbaijan is limited only in matters which have voluntarily been delegated by the Republic itself to the USSR, that it "retains for itself the right to withdraw freely from the USSR", and that it "has the right to enter into direct relations with foreign states".¹⁶ The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict's impact on the declaration was clear: It emphasised "the Sovereignty of Azerbaijan extends over all its territory, including the Nakhichevan Autonomous Republic and the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous oblast that are inalienable parts of the union republic. The territory of the republic, declared, cannot be changed without Azerbaijan's agreement, expressed in a referendum of the whole

¹⁶ Moscow Television Service , October 5, 1989 (*FBIS-SOV-89-193*)

population conducted by a decision of the Supreme Soviet. Frontiers with other union republics can be changed only by mutual agreement".¹⁷ The law stated that "the land, its soils, forests, waters, and other natural resources are national riches and the property of the republic, and belong to its people", and that the Azerbaijani language is declared the state language. However, the free use and development of Russian and other language used by the population was ensured.¹⁸

Despite the PFA's recognition by the authorities in Baku and the formal declaration of the republic's Sovereignty, confrontation between the Azerbaijani PFA-led opposition and the communist establishment continued through the fall and winter of 1989. Crippling strikes and demonstrations demanding true Sovereignty and the return of Nagorno-Karabakh to Azerbaijani rule persisted through the end of 1989. Violent confrontations surged in a number of locations between Armenians and Azerbaijanis; the worst was on the weekend of January 13th-14th, 1990 in Baku. Which left up to ninety Armenians and a number of Azerbaijanis dead?¹⁹

After January 1990 the APF led a semi clandestine existence whilst Ayaz N. Mutalibov, the new Communist Party First Secretary,

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ The violence against the Baku Armenians led to their mass exodus from the city. In Armenian minds, "Black January" refers to these violent events, while in Azerbaijan the term refers to the subsequent violence by Moscow against the Azerbaijanis.

tried to resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict with Soviet military help and so neutralise the nationalist appeal of the APF.²⁰ The attempted coup in Moscow in August 1991, which Mutalibov was one of the few republican leaders to support openly, marked the collapse of this strategy and, in the autumn of 1991, the APF began to reemerge as a powerful political force. Although Mutalibov was elected unopposed as president in September 1991, not long after he was forced to replace the Supreme Soviet with a new fifty member National Assembly (*Milli Mejlis*) in which the opposition was given half the deputies.²¹ This appointed body did not have the legitimacy on which a constitutional regime could be consolidated and over the following three years Azerbaijani politics was characterised by a series of coups and, between 1991 and 1993, the country had four presidents.²²

For the first six months of its existence as an independent state Azerbaijan was enveloped in political turmoil.²³ At the beginning of March 1992 Mutalibov was forced to resign as president following the massacre of Azerbaijani civilians at Khojali in Nagorno-Karabakh²⁴. Iaqub Mamedov, who served as the interim President, refused to make political concessions to the APF and

²⁰ Independent, 29 September 1990; and Guardian, 12 September 1991.

²¹ Elizabeth Fuller, *Azerbaijan at the Crossroads*, RIIA, 1994, p.5.

²² Aiaz Mutalibov (September 1991 to March 1992); Iaqub Mamedov (March 1992 to May 1992); Abulfaz Elchibey (June 1992 to July 1993); and Heydar Aliiev (October 1993 onwards).

²³ Joseph Kechichian and Theodore Karasik. "The Crisis in Azerbaijan: How Clans Influence The Politics of an Emerging Republic", *Middle East Policy*, vol. 4, Nos. 1-2, (1995), p.58

²⁴ Elizabeth Fuller, *Azerbaijan at the crossroads*, RIIA, 1994, p.57.

include its nominees in the government and, after the failure of an attempt by Mutalibov to seize power at the beginning of May, the APF, took over the government. Abulfaz Elchibey, the leader of the APF and, like Gamsakhurdia, a former dissident, then won new Presidential elections at the beginning of June.²⁵

Since Mutalibov's political strategy had counted on the continuing existence of the Soviet Union, very little progress had been made on the front of establishing state apparatus by the time Elchibey became President. Although an Azerbaijani National Army had formally been set up in October 1991, in mid-March 1992 the total strength of the army was only about 500 men.²⁶

Dilemmas of the New State

After a series of carryover and caretaker governments, a Popular Front-led government, under the leadership of Abulfaz Elchibey, was elected in May 1992²⁷ in the first democratic elections in the new state. The period from independence to the fall of the Elchibey government was highly charged ideologically. The new regime imposed few restrictions on freedom of expression, and debates abounded in the media on the identity of the new state and its citizens. Independent Azerbaijan had no honeymoon period

²⁵ The June 1992 Presidential elections were the most open of any held in Azerbaijan's recent history although Aliiev was prevented from standing by the setting of an age limit of 65 for candidates just before the elections. In 1992, Aliiev was aged 69.

²⁶ Richard Woff, "The Armed Forces of Azerbaijan" in *Jane's Intelligence Review*, vol.5, No. 10, October 1993, p.460.

²⁷ Dilip Hiro, "Aliyev Wins Again", *Middle East International*, No.588(1998),p.17

in which to determine its creeds and national priorities. Instead, it was born into a war with Armenia, an extensive refugee population, tense relations with most of its other neighbours, and a collapsed social welfare system.

The ideological debates over the identity of the new state were fuelled by the urgent need to make policies. For instance, the new state had to determine state symbols and language. It faced challenges that demanded that it prioritize its values – such as stability versus civil liberties; the conflict of interests between the new state and the Azerbaijani ethnic group; defining who is a citizen; designating the rights of the non Azerbaijani citizens, both individually and collectively; determining the relations between religion and state; resolving the problem of how to consider historical lands outside the jurisdiction of the new state; and relations between the new state and co-ethnics beyond its borders.²⁸

Once in power, the PFA activists needed to find a balance between Azerbaijani ethnic identity and Azerbaijani state civic identity and to formulate a state identity that could encompass the Azerbaijani ethnic group as well as other ethnic groups in the new state.

²⁸ Tadeusz Swietochowski, "Azerbaijan: A Borderland at Crossroads of History" in Fredrick Starr, ed. *The Legacy of History in Russia and the new States of Eurasia* (London: M.E. Sharpe, 1994), p.292

This created many dilemmas. Years of cultural oppression had instilled in the new government a drive to create a state that was a manifestation of Azerbaijani ethnic culture. Yet, the liberal values and practical considerations of the new ruling elite motivated them to search for accommodation with the non-Azerbaijani ethnic groups in the republic. Before their rise to power, the mainstream of the PFA leadership had emphasized Azerbaijani ethnic-based identity; upon assuming power, they attempted to formulate an additional territorial based civic and state identity that would encompass all the citizens of the new state. For example, the terms Azerbaijani and Azerbaijanism were used to refer to citizens of the state and patriotism toward it, while "Turk" or Azerbaijani Turk", were used to designate ethnic Azerbaijanis. Tension persisted between territorial versus ethnic based identity in the new state , as well as the balance between civic and ethnic identity. These topics were debated throughout the post-independence period. This debate was complicated by the fact that the majority of the ethnic Azerbaijanis lived outside the borders of the new state.

The situation in the new state challenged many of the tenets of PFA ideology that it had espoused while in opposition. For instance, the movement and especially its leader, Elchibey, were committed to campaigning for expanded ties with the Azerbaijanis in Iran and championing their cultural and language rights .This

cause severely complicated Azerbaijan's relations with Iran²⁹. During the war with Armenia, and given the complicated relations with Russia, the new Republic could hardly afford hostile relations with its neighbours to the south; thus Elchibey, when serving as president, toned down his south Azerbaijan campaign.

The wave of nationalism which marked the events in Transcaucasus in the dying days of Soviet Union got its epicenter stationed in Nagorno-Karabakh, where Armenian and Azerbaijani jingoism clashed head on. The fight for a separate identity by Azerbaijan *vis-à-vis* Soviet Union and Armenia, which began with the ecological issues in late 1980s did not subside much even after the independence of Azerbaijan. The confusion and chaos which marked the events leading to the independence continued in one form or the other even after independence. The confusion was most visible on the political front resulting into political instability in Baku. Nagorno-Karabakh continued to act as the epicentre of nationalism as far as events in Azerbaijan are concerned. The progress on war theatre in Nagorno-Karabakh guided and shaped the course of political developments in the independent Azerbaijan during 1993-94 which is discussed in the following chapter.

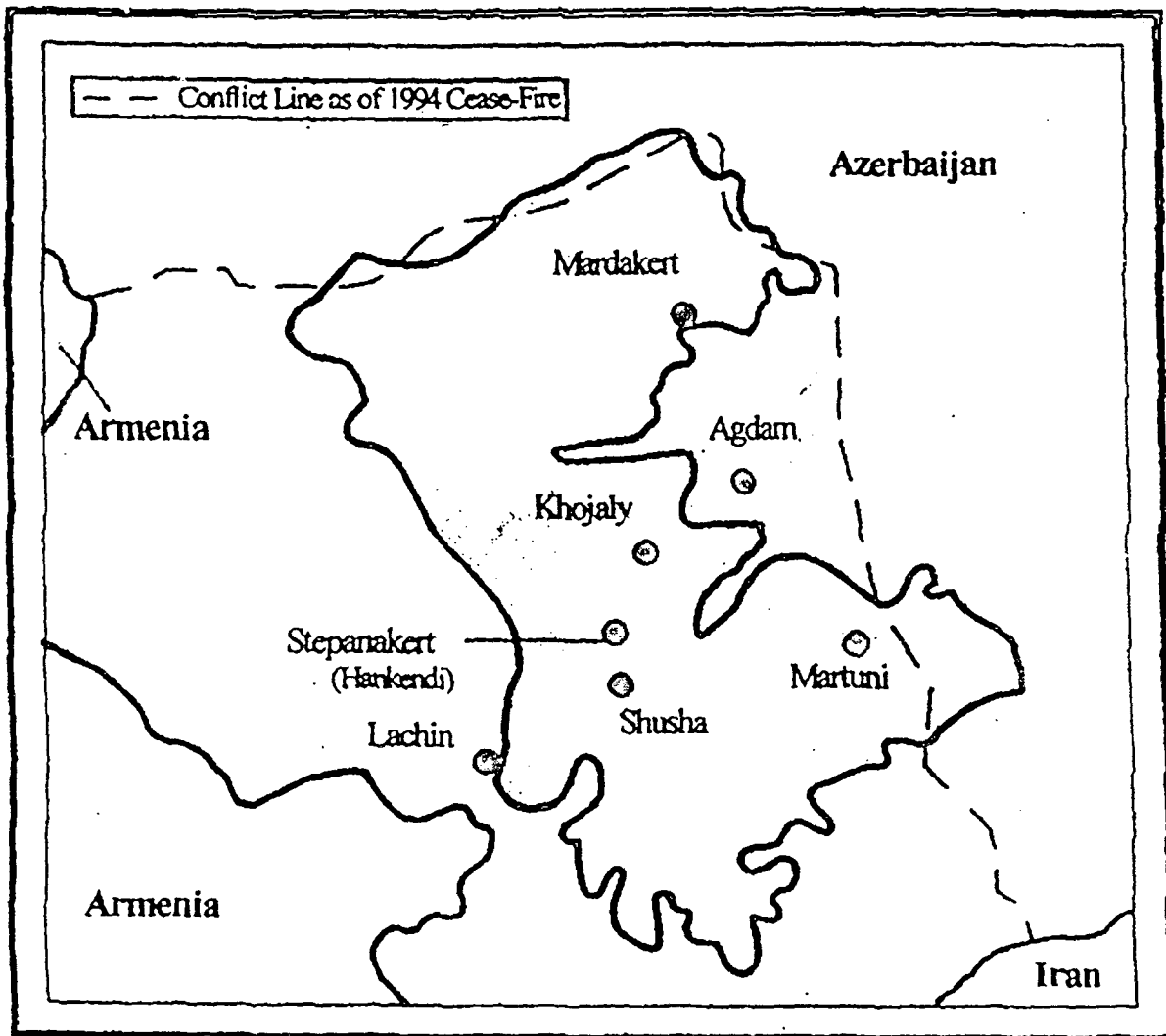
²⁹ Karen Dawisha and Bruce Parrott, *Russia and the New States of Eurasia: The Politics of Upheava* (Cambridge:Cambridge University Press,1994)

CHAPTER – III

NAGORNO-KARABAKH CONFLICT AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN AZERBAIJAN 1993-94

The first problem that the independent Azerbaijan had to grapple with was the ongoing fierce fighting in Nagorno-Karabakh. This territory has been quite instrumental in shaping the course of events in political firmament of Azerbaijan. The irredentist aspirations of Azeris for this piece of land have an antiquated past. This irredentism itself has been borne out of a long period of ethno cultural development in southern transcaucasus. Thanks to the diverse mix of cultural strands, Nagorno-Karabakh became a fault line between Iranian-Turkish Azeris on the one hand and Christian Armenians on the other. It is in this context that the present chapter attempts to examine the political developments in Azerbaijan during 1993-94. These developments took place in the shadow of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict which dominated changes during this period. But to get a full idea of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and concomitant political developments during 1993-94, the historical antiquity of the conflict will have to be taken into consideration first.

Nagorno-Karabakh



THE REGION OF NAGORNO KARABAKH UNDER DISPUTE

Nagorno – Karabakh: Origin of the Conflict

The root of the hostility between the Azerbaijan and Armenians exists in a complex, multifaceted antagonism that developed largely during Tsarist Russian Rule. The vectors of socio-political development in the Russian empire produced a situation by late nineteenth and early 20th century where, the Armenians were disproportionately benefited out of the bargain and they took commanding lead *vis-à-vis* Azeri's.

Among the Azerbaijanis the reality of backward status caused feelings of resentment that gradually coalesced into anti-Armenian feelings.¹ These sentiments were given an intellectual basis.

Pan- Turkism espoused the union of all Turkic people from the Balkans to Western China and the promotion of a sense of national, linguistic and historical commonality among them. The growth of this ideology among the Azerbaijanis of the Russian Empire fuelled anti Armenian sentiments not only because of its inherently racist nature, but also because Armenia itself was viewed as a geographic obstacle dividing the Turkic world². Apart from the widening of the ethnic chasm between the two

¹ Ronald G. Suny, *Looking toward Ararat: Armenia in Modern History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), p.199.

² Christopher J.Walker , *Armenia and Karabakh:The struggle for Unity*(London: Minority Rights Publications,1991),p.84.

nationalities the Tsarist nationality policies tended to worsen their already tense relationship. The Tsarist policy of divide-and-rule sought to promote jealousy and division among neighboring ethnic group in order to ensure the monarchy's grip on power.

Azeri scholars hold that, initially adherents of Christianity, the majority of the Albanian population converted to Islam in the seventh century A.D. and were linguistically Turkified four hundred years later³. They refuse to accept the antiquity of Armenian claims regarding their habitation on mountainous Karabakh. In contrast, Azeri's argue that, indigenous Albanian population of Karabakh predates Armenians.

The Bolshevik revolution of 1917 added a new dimension to the whole scenario. Despite its pullout from Transcaucasus in late 1917, Russia regarded the independent of Transcaucasus only temporary. The Eleventh Red Army entered Baku unopposed on 27th April 1920 taking advantage of virtually undefended border and Azerbaijan became the first Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR) of Transcaucasia the next day.⁴ Thus the question of Nagorno-Karabakh was transformed overnight from an inter-state dispute to an internal matter of the Soviet Union. Throughout late 1920 and

³ Charles Burney and David Marshall Lang, *The Peoples of the Hills: Ancient Ararat and Caucasus* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1971), p.88

⁴ Richard Pipes, *The Formation of the Soviet Union: Communism and Nationalism, 1917-1923* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964), pp. 226-227.

the first half of 1921, a curious series of events transpired that resulted in the incorporation of Nagorno-Karabakh into Azerbaijan.

Stalin created the Autonomous oblast of Nagorno-Karabakh (AONK) on 7th July 1923 and drew its borders so as to leave narrow strip of land separating it physically from Armenia.⁵ As an Autonomous area under Azerbaijan suzerainty, the AONK was granted the authority to administer its own affairs in the realm of culture and education, and parallel party and state organs were created and staffed by Armenians.⁶ In 1937, the region's name was changed permanently to the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous oblast (NKAO).⁷

In the following decades the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh was suppressed by the strong central rule of Soviet Union. But the mutual antagonism on both sides failed to die and remained dormant. Both parties were buying time. The aspirations related to the land of Nagorno-Karabakh remained ingrained in hearts of Azeris & Armenians. These aspirations once again came to the fore during the closing years of Gorbachev era.

⁵ Walker, n.2, p. 109.

⁶ Audrey L. Altstadt, *The Azerbaijani Turks: Power and Identity Under Russian Rule* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1992), p. 126.

⁷ Audrey L. Altstadt, "Nagorno-Karabakh: Apple of Discord in the Azerbaijan SSR", *Central Asian Survey*, 7(4), 1988, p. 67.

1991: The year of upheavals

The year 1991 saw a marked escalation in violence between the Armenians and Azerbaijanis. Beginning with operation "Ring" in April, clashes expanded from the inter-communal disorders that characterized the previous three years into direct confrontation between armed units of both southern Soviet republics. By the time of the USSR's breakup in late 1991, Armenia and Azerbaijan were poised on the brink of full-scale war.

Operation "Ring" began on 30th April 1991, when Azerbaijani militia unit and Soviet army forces attacked the Armenian inhabited villages of *Getashen* and *martunashen* 25 kilometers north of Nagorno-Karabakh.⁸ As its name implies, the venture entailed the surrounding of the villages by Soviet tanks and armoured personnel carriers, followed by a sweep through the ringed area by Azerbaijani militia and Soviet Interior Ministry units. Over the course of the next several days, Soviet and Azerbaijani troops combed through both towns in a search for guerrillas and weapons, often interrogating and beating the inhabitants and arresting arbitrarily the male heads of household.⁹ Following such action the occupants of *Gatashen* and *Martunashen* were deported forcibly to *stepanakert* and replaced by Azeri refugees that had

⁸ Michael Dobbs, "Armenia-Azerbaijan clash leaves at least 25 Dead," *Washington post* (2 May 1991), p. A26.

⁹ *Helsinki watch*, Bloodshed in the Caucasus: Escalation of the Armed conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh (New York: Helsinki watch, September 1992), p. 9.

fled Armenia over the previous three years.¹⁰ While operation "Ring" continued in Armenia, 15th May 1991 saw the onset of Soviet-Azerbaijani Military operation in the NKAO.

Operation "Ring" failed to frustrate Armenian desire for independence. It rather intensified the desire on the part of Armenians. They felt anguished because of Soviet-Azeri cooperation. Soviet-Azerbaijani military cooperation in NKAO diluted for good, all chances of any Armenian-Azerbaijani cooperation over Nagorno-Karabakh.

The failed coup of August 1991 had a momentous impact on the development of the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict. The months following the attempted coup saw the emergence of the two republics as independent states, the pullout of Soviet forces from Nagorno-Karabakh, and a major escalation in the level of violence in the area. The Azerbaijani Government took an initial stand of support for the August Coup attempt.¹¹ Following the suppression of the Popular Front, Mutalibov moved to have himself chosen president in an election in which he was the only candidate.

As had been the case when he was installed as the AZCP First Secretary at the onset of the Soviet intervention in Baku the

¹⁰ Daniel Sneider, "Armenians and Azerbaijanis clash in two Soviet Villages", *Christian Science Monitor* (7 May 1991), p. 5.

¹¹ *Milliyet*, 24 August 1991, *Interfax*, 23 August 1991k, and *Izvestiya*, 26 August 1991, in *FBIS-SOV*, # 91-165 (26 August 1991), pp 105-106.

previous January, Mutalibov once again realized that he would have to cater to nationalist sentiments in Azerbaijan in order to stay in power. As a start, the Azerbaijani government issued a blanket denial of its support for the Moscow putsch, and, in an attempt to preempt a similar Armenian move; the Azerbaijani Supreme Soviet adopted a declaration of independence on 30th August 1991.¹² Finally in an act most likely to stoke up support for the regime, Mutalibov promised a crackdown on Nagorno-Karabakh separatism.

The aftermath of the failed August coup initiated a period of disarray among Soviet military forces stationed in the Transcaucasus. As a result of ensuing chaos, hopelessness and disorder among the rank and file of armed forces, large amount of sophisticated weaponry fell into the hands of Armenians & Azerbaijanis. This worked as fodder for the fire. Apart from obtaining weaponry from Soviet soldiers themselves, Armenian and Azerbaijani fighters often conducted raids on military installations and depots throughout the region.¹³ As a result of these phenomena, the two sides came into possession of large numbers of weapons that contributed greatly to an escalation in

¹² TASS International Service, 30 August 1991, in *FBIS-SOV*, # 91-169 (30 August 1991),p. 123.

¹³ For example, Azerbaijani armed groups took over a major arms depot of the Transcaucasus military district in the town of Agdam on 21 December, resulting in their acquisition of a large amount of heavy weaponry and ammunition. TASS International services, 21 December 1991, in *FBIS-SOV*, # 91-246 (23 December 1991),pp 66-67.

the level and scope of warfare between Armenia and Azerbaijan in the closing months of 1991.¹⁴

But before the escalation of violence in Nagorno-Karabakh, a hand at peace was given by the mediating efforts of Boris Yeltsin, the president of Russian Federation and Nursultan Nazarbayev, the Kazakhstan president. These two ex-Soviet leaders tried their hands at finding a solution to the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict with a highly intensified shuttle diplomacy in September 1991. After endorsing a key Azerbaijani and a bi-ethnic delegation from Nagorno-Karabakh to meet face-to-face for the first time¹⁵ unexpectedly, Armenia renounced all claims to Azerbaijani territory on 22nd September 1991, allowing a communiqué to be signed that offered the promise of ending hostilities between the two republics.¹⁶

The September 1991 communiqué was a milestone in the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan for the first time in three years of strife, a compromise acceptable to the leaders of both republics and representatives from the NKAO had been found.¹⁷

¹⁴ Paul B. Henze, *The Transcaucasus in Transition* (Santa Monica: RAND corporation, 1991), p. 11.

¹⁵ Fred Hiatt, "Armenians, Azerbaijanis agree to talks on Disputed Enclave", *Washington Post* (23 September 1991): A13.

¹⁶ Fred Hiatt, "Armenia, Azerbaijan Agree to cease-fire", (25 September 1991): A 20.

¹⁷ The Armenian leader made it clear from the start that complete mutual understanding did not exist on all points outlined in the agreement. However, he also stressed the necessity both for compromise and for continued work on the details. See Radio *Rossii* network, 24 September 1991, in *FBIS-SOV*, #91-186 (25 September 1991): 71; and Bill Keller, "Armenia and Azerbaijan sign a peace agreement", *New York Times* (24 September 1991): A 12.

However, despite the Russian and Kazakhstani mediated negotiations, clashes continued unabated in and around Nagorno-Karabakh.

On 4th November 1991, Azerbaijan shut down a pipeline that supplied Armenia with 1.5 million cubic meters of natural gas per day from Russia.¹⁸ Within two weeks, life in the capital city of Yerevan came to a virtual standstill, and Armenian delegates walked out of the ongoing talks mediated by Russian and Kazakhstani observers.¹⁹ Thereafter, the pace of military operations by Armenian units in Nagorno-Karabakh accelerated greatly, resulting in the retaking of several dozen villages abandoned by Armenians during operation "Ring".²⁰

Just as events in the Transcaucasus were leading Armenia and Azerbaijan to open warfare in late 1991, occurrences elsewhere in the Soviet Union were also taking place that proved to have a major impact on the hostilities. The effects of the breakup of the USSR on the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict were felt first and foremost in the battlefield. On 23rd December 1991,

¹⁸ Interfax, 13 November 1991, in *FBIS-SOV*, # 91-220 (14 November 1991), p. 77.

¹⁹ A third round in the talk had begun on 18 November, with agreement in principle being reached on a cease-fire, withdrawal of forces from the conflict zone, and the exchange of prisoners. The Armenians walked out two days later, declining they would return only after the pipeline's reopening. Interfax, 18 November 1991, in *FBIS-SOV*, # 91-223 (19 November 1991): 82; and *Radio Yerevan Network*, 20 November 1991, in *FBIS-SOV* # 91-225 (21 November 1991): 80.

²⁰ Armenpress International Service, 19 November 1991, in *FBIS-SOV*, # 91-224 (20 November 1991): 81; and Interfax, 20 November 1991, in *FBIS-SOV*, # 91-225 (21 November 1991): 84.

USSR Interior ministry forces based in Nagorno-Karabakh began withdrawing from the oblast under the pretext that the Soviet Union's dissolution had nullified the legal basis for their continued presence there. This was followed immediately by an escalation in Azerbaijani attacks on Armenian towns and villages in and around Nagorno-Karabakh.

The Soviet Union's demise also had a major impact over the long term on the military situation in the southern Transcaucasus. In addition to the Interior Ministry Military presence in Nagorno-Karabakh, forces of the Soviet Seventh and Fourth Armies were based in Armenia and Azerbaijan, respectively, at the time of the USSR's breakup. Significant number of these forces were nationalized or otherwise found their way into the hands of the Armenians and Azerbaijanis during 1992, with pivotal effects for the course of hostilities between their republics.

The demise of the Soviet Union also had a major impact on the geopolitical landscape of the region for the first time in more than 70 years. The antagonism between Armenia and Azerbaijan was no longer an internal matter of the USSR. The clash instead became an affair between two ostensibly sovereign members of the international community. Moreover, rivalries among the leading regional powers – Russia, Turkey, and Iran – that had coloured the Transcaucasus' history for centuries were awakened once

again, bringing new complexities and new danger to the dispute. From the time of the Soviet Union's breakup onward, the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict became wrapped up inextricably with the dynamics of regional geopolitical rivalries among the Russian, Turks, and Iranians. The breakup of the Soviet Union, though, affected the whole dynamics of global politics leading the world into post cold war era; its impact on the south Transcaucasus was phenomenal. It set in motion the pent up emotion and hatred between two traditional rivals in Nagorno-Karabakh. The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict entered a new, more deadly phase.

1992-94: War of two Independent Countries

The opening months of 1992 were marked by the explosion of full-scale war in and around Nagorno-Karabakh between forces of the fledgling Azerbaijani national army and locally raised units of the so-called Karabakh army, both of whom had acquired substantial amounts of weaponry from withdrawing Soviet Interior Ministry troops and from Soviet military facilities. Catalyst for an early 1992 Azerbaijani offensive was the 18th January proclamation of an independent Nagorno-Karabakh Republic (NKR) by the Supreme Soviet of the former NKAO.

In response to the declaration of independence by Nagorno-Karabakh, the Azerbaijanis launched a major military operation against *stepanakert* from the nearby town of *Agdam* on

31st January. Intended apparently to drive Armenian forces out of the area;²¹ the offensive included several thousands Azerbaijani soldiers backed by armoured vehicles and rocket and artillery fire.²² Following the collapse of the large-scale Azerbaijani ground assault against *stepanakert* by the first week of February, ethnic Armenian forces went on the offensive in areas to the north and southwest of the Karabakh capital. This round of intensified battle had political fallout too especially for the Mutalibov regime. The fall of *Khojaly* proved to be the last straw for the regime of President Ayaz Mutalibov. With popular anger building over the Government's failure to bring the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh under control and protect the region's remaining Azeri population, more than 80,000 angry demonstrators calling for Mutalibov's resignation gathered outside the parliament building and police refused to obey orders to disperse the crowd.²³ Mutalibov agreed to step down on 5th March, and parliament speaker Yaqub Mamedov was made the acting president until elections could be held on 7th June.²⁴ This political upheaval in Baku set the stage both for a power struggle within Azerbaijan and a renewed

²¹ According to president Mutalibov, "The only way to achieve peace is for the [Armenian] terrorists and mercenaries to be moved away. Then we will sit down and make peace with the remaining Armenians, with whom we have always lived in peace." Quoted by *Agence France Presse*, 1 February 1992, in *FBIS-SOV*, # 92-023 (4 February 1992), p. 77.

²² *Agence France Presse*, 31 January 1992, in *FBIS - SOV*, # 92-021 (31 January 1992), p. 73.

²³ Interfax, 6 March 1992, in *FBIS-SOV*, # 92-045 (6 March 1992): 64.

²⁴ Francis X. Clines, "Angry Azerbaijanis Impel Chief to Quit", *New York Times* (7 March 1992): 3.

Armenian offensive in Nagorno-Karabakh. Before such events could be realized fully, however, Iran entered the arena as a mediator of the Armenia – Azerbaijan conflict, viewed by both sides as an honest broker on the Karabakh question. Iran began its mediation efforts in early February 1992 at the behest of the Armenian and Azerbaijani foreign ministers. From the Iranian perspective, the possibility of becoming the chief peacemaker in the Armenian-Azerbaijan conflict was a golden opportunity to gain influence in the region at the expense of Turkey. The result was an agreement in principle on a draft plan for resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute.²⁵

Although a cease-fire was observed generally by the warring sides for more than a week,²⁶ Azerbaijani units resumed their relentless shelling of *stepanakert* on 29th March, and Karabakh Armenian fighters were again forced to take action against the sources of the attacks. The focus of Armenian operations was the city of *Shusha*, the last remaining Azeri stronghold in Nagorno-Karabakh and the launching point for Azerbaijani military operations against *stepankert*.²⁷ After two days of fierce fighting, local Armenian units took the city, forcing their opponents to flee

²⁵ An early component of the draft plan envisaged the deployment of "Multinational Peacemaking Forces", dominated not surprisingly by Iran, to the conflict zone following a cease-fire. Although Armenia welcomed the proposal, the issue of peacekeeping forces was not included in the final draft plan for reasons not given. TASS, 11 March 1992, in *FBIS-SOV*, # 92-049 (12 March 1992):69

²⁶ Voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran First Program Network, 27 March 1992, in *FBIS-SOV*, # 92-060 (27 March 1992): 66.

²⁷ ITAR-TASS, 10 May 1992, in *FBIS-SOV*, # 92-091 (11 May 1992): 80.

towards the town of *Iachin*. Taking advantage of the political disarray in Azerbaijan local Armenian forces launched an assault on *Iachin*, a town situated strategically at the narrowest strip of Azerbaijani land separating Nagorno-Karabakh from Armenia.

While the string of Armenian military victories in Nagorno-Karabakh, the political unrest in Azerbaijan, and the failed Iranian mediation efforts were the distinguishing events of the first phase of the Karabakh war, other aspects of early 1992 are also worthy of note. First was the glaring absence of Russia as an active player in the Transcaucasus. Following the collapse of joint Russian Kazakhstan effort to achieve a peaceful resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute in late 1991, Russia withdrew from its active peacemaking role in the Transcaucasus. Aside from a fleeting and unsuccessful attempt to achieve a cease-fire in the combat zone in late February,²⁸ Moscow's position on the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict in early 1992 was characterized more by inaction than action.

Early 1992 also saw the onset of a heated internal debate in Ankara on the question of Turkish policy towards the Armenia –

²⁸ A meeting of the Russian, Armenian and Azerbaijani foreign ministers in Moscow on 20th February resulted in the adoption of a communiqué calling for an immediate cease-fire in the conflict zone, the lifting of energy and communications blockades, the delivery of humanitarian aid, and the commencement of negotiations for a comprehensive political settlement. The plan drew support from Turkey and the west primarily because it excluded Iran as a partner. However, the communiqué came to naught with the Armenian capture of Khojally five days later. *Mayak Radio Network*, 20 February 1992, in FBIS-SOV, # 92-035 (21 February 1992): 22.

Azerbaijan conflict. Fearing that heightened Turkish support for Azerbaijan would not only increase the risk of creating the perception of a newly aggressive pan-Turkic policy in Ankara but also run the danger of estranging Turkey from its North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) allies²⁹ Prime Minister Suleman Demirel pursued a cautious policy aimed primarily at finding a peaceful solution to the dispute while "preventing the clashes from spreading further and involving the entire region".³⁰ Amidst political uncertainties in Baku, Azerbaijan suffered heavy losses in Nagorno-Karabakh in first half of 1992. But new circumstances arose in June that caused the military situation to shift back in Azerbaijan's favour, albeit temporarily. The election of an ardent nationalist Abulfaz Elchibey as the president of Azerbaijan brought many changes as for as external relations were concerned. He reversed many of the policies of Mutalibov regime. Elichibey sought to steer the republic's external alignment away from Russia and the CIS.³¹

Eschewing Mutalibov's policy of cultivating close ties with the former centre in Moscow, Elchibey strove to make Turkey the Primary focus of Azerbaijani foreign relations. There were a

²⁹ Elizabeth Fuller, "Nagorno-Karabakh: Can Turkey Remain Neutral?" *RFE/RL Research Report* 1, no. 14 (3 April 1992): 37.

³⁰ Statement of Prime Minister Suleyman Demirel as read by TRT Television Network, 1 March 1992, in *FBIS-WEU*, # 92-041 (2 March 1992): 28.

³¹ Elizabeth Fuller, "Azerbaijan's Relations with Russia and the CIS", *RFE/RL Research Report* 1, No. 43 (30 October 1992): 54.

handful of reasons for this shift. First, the APF and Elchibey in particular held ardently pro-Turkish and in some respects, Pan-Turkic views, believing that the Azerbaijanis' ethno-linguistic heritage made Turkey a natural choice as Baku's main external partner. Secondly, Turkey represented the model of a secular, democratic, market oriented state to which Azerbaijan could aspire. Finally, Turkey – through its ties to NATO and the West offered Azerbaijan a potential means through which to offset what was viewed as biased Russian support for Armenia in the Karabakh struggle.³²

Apart from showing definite preference for Turkey in external relations, the Elchibey government also set out to regain the initiative in the conflict zone. Elchibey gave priority to increasing the effectiveness of the fledgling national army that had been brutalized by the Armenians over the previous months. Emergency measures were enacted immediately to begin the process, including a decree requiring the disbandment and disarmament of all informal military formations in Azerbaijan, whose often independent and uncoordinated operations in Nagorno-Karabakh had resulted in much of the gains by ethnic Armenian forces.³³ Elchibey's reform efforts were undertaken in

³² Shireen T. Hunter, *The Transcaucasus in Transition: Nation-Building and conflict* (Washington, DC: Praeger, 1994), pp. 83-84.

³³ Elizabeth Fuller, "Paramilitary Forces Dominate Fighting in Transcucasus", *RFE/RL Research Report 2*, No. 25 (18 June 1993): 79.

tandem with the launching of a large-scale Azerbaijani offensive in Nagorno-Karabakh on 12th June, scarcely five days after his election.

In mid September 1992, Azerbaijani troops pressed their continued advantage to strike at the strategic *lachin* corridor linking Armenia and the former NKAO. The capture of commanding heights in the *lachin* and *shusha* districts on 18-19 September gave Azerbaijani forces the ability to interdict traffic through the corridor with artillery.³⁴ With their lifeline to Armenia in grave danger, Karabakh forces launched a counter-offensive aimed at retaking the heights around *lachin*. After intense fighting from 7th to 11th October, the Armenians succeeded in pushing their opponents off the heights and retaking nearby village.³⁵ While the immediate danger to the *lachin* corridor was relieved by the operation, the region continued to come under periodic Azerbaijani military pressure next several months.

The intensified struggle in Nagorno-Karabakh was paralleled by a new wave of mediation, this time Russia and the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) being the key players. These mediators filled the void left by the Iranian withdrawal from the peace process. The CSCE convened

³⁴ *Mayak Radio Network*, 19 September 1992, and ITAR-TASS, 19 September 1992, in FBIS-SOV # 92-183 (21 September 1992): 65.

³⁵ *Assa-Irada*, 7 October 1992, in FBIS-SOV, # 92-196 (8 October 1992): 51; and Interfax, 11 October 1992, in FBIS-SOV, 92-198 (13 October 1992): 38.

multilateral talks in June 1992 for the purpose of preparing for a formal peace conference to be held in Minsk on the Nagorno-Karabakh question. At preliminary discussions in Rome, which were attended by delegates of a core group of CSCE member states that came to be known as the Minsk Group – Russia, Sweden, Turkey, Italy, Germany, France, Czechoslovakia, Belarus, and the United States – Armenian and Azerbaijani delegates were pressed to hammer out negotiating positions acceptable at a minimum to each other.³⁶ But the CSCE peace efforts did not bring much turnaround in the ground realities. This failure on the part of CSCE prompted Russia to try its hand at resolving the Armenia-Azerbaijan dispute for the first time since September 1991. This time, however, Russia adopted the approach of dealing with the easiest thing first. This meant, Russia focused solely on ceasefire in the battle zone, leaving aside ticklish issues for the moment. After a marathon negotiating session carried out in secret with the active participation of Russian Defence Minister Pavel Grachev, the defence chiefs of Armenia and Azerbaijan signed a detailed agreement on 19th September calling for a five-month cease-fire and a phased withdrawal of the warring parties' armed formations from Nagorno-Karabakh. But once again notwithstanding the high sounding aims of agreement there was no lull in fighting and military struggle,

³⁶ *Agence France Presse*, 20 June 1992, in *FBIS-WEU*, # 92-120 (22 June 1992): 2.

instead now reached the Armenia-Azerbaijan border in the closing months of 1992. After being continued generally to the region of Nagorno-Karabakh and immediately surrounding areas, the conflict was at last threatening to take on the character of a full-scale war between the two Transcaucasian republics. Indeed, 1993 witnessed a major escalation in the hostilities between Armenia and Azerbaijan, and escalation that nearly resulted in international crisis on two separate occasions. The fifth year of the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict opened with the onset of a large-scale military operation by the Karabakh Armenian forces ostensibly at regaining ground lost to Azerbaijan over the prior six months. Baku's army found itself unable to stop the Armenian assault.

Following their victories in the north, Karabakh Armenian forces turned to the west and attacked the *Kelbajar* district of Azerbaijan. Unmistakable strategic objective behind the assault was the opening of a new land link between Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh. After heavy fighting from 31st March to 3rd April local Armenian troops succeeded in capturing the regional centre of *Kelbajar* and numerous surrounding villages.

The expansion of military operation significantly beyond the borders of Nagorno-Karabakh by local Armenian forces sparked a major outcry by a host of international actors including the United Nations. The UN Security Council released a statement on 6th

April 1993 expressing "serious concern" with the capture of *Kelbajar* and calling for an immediate cessation of the hostilities.³⁷

Similarly, the United States made known its "deep concern" with the offensive and called for "the prompt and complete withdrawal of all ethnic Armenian forces from the *Kelbajar* district."³⁸

However, the most serious reactions came from Turkey and Iran.

As international tensions increased in the Transcaucasus, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 822 on 30th April 1993. The first security council resolution concerning the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict, 822 called for an immediate cease-fire and the prompt withdrawal of "all occupying forces from the *Kelbajar* district and other recently occupied areas of Azerbaijan."³⁹ Additionally, the resolution upheld the principle of the inviolability of international borders and designated the CSCE as the primary forum through which the parties were encouraged to seek peace. But events in the Transcaucasus in June 1993 once again outpaced the efforts of mediators and leaders alike as political instability returned to Baku.

The popularity of President Elchibey and the Azerbaijani Popular Front among the Azerbaijani populace began to decline

³⁷ Quoted in Elizabeth Fuller, "International Diplomatic Reaction to fighting in Azerbaijan", *RFE/RL News Briefs* 2, No. 16 (5-8 April 1993): 8.

³⁸ United States Department of State, "Offensive in Azerbaijan's Kelbajar District" and *U.S. Department of State Dispatch* 4, No. 15 (12 April 1993): 229.

³⁹ *United Nations Security Council, S/RES/ 822 [1993] (30 April 1993): 2.*

substantially in the first half of 1993. As discontent with the slow pace of economic reforms, the failure to achieve a military victory in Nagorno-Karabakh, and the continued presence of corrupt former communist *nomenklatura* at high levels of the government, grew among the populace, the APF came to realize that its declining popularity threatened increasingly its hold on power. This round of political turmoil had its shadow in the battle of Nagorno-Karabakh. In early 1993, the APF began to view colonel Surat Huseinov as the greatest potential danger to its position, as the most successful of all Azerbaijani military commanders in Nagorno-Karabakh,⁴⁰ Huseinov built up a popular following in a number of towns near the conflict zone. When Huseinov pulled his forces out of *Mardakert* in February and redeployed them in the Azerbaijani town of *Ganja*, the APF-led Elchibey government dismissed the commander in disgrace and expelled him from the Popular Front.⁴¹

This small incident later turned into a full blown crisis and brought manifold changes in the political leadership in Baku and its foreign policy orientation. Despite his ouster, Huseinov and his 707th brigade remained in *Ganja*, where they enjoyed great

⁴⁰ Huseinov had been hand-picked by Elchibey in 1992 to command the Azerbaijani force that led the successful assault on Armenian controlled northern Nagorno-Karabakh. For his efforts, he was awarded the republic's highest award, that of National Hero of Azerbaijan. Sokhbet Mamedov".

⁴¹ *Radio Rossii Network*, 23 February 1993, in FBIS-SOV, # 93-034 (23 February 1993): 58.

popularity as opponents of the Elchibey regime. On 28th May 1993, by prior agreement with the Baku authorities, Russian forces based in *Ganja* began their pullout from Azerbaijan, leaving behind substantial quantities of arms, ammunition, and equipment when Huseinov's men attempted to seize the weaponry on 4th June, Azerbaijani government forces stepped in and a major clash ensued.⁴² Infuriated by the attack, Huseinov and his supporters seized control of *Ganja* and several surrounding villages and demanded the immediate resignation of Elchibey. Elchibey decided to open negotiations with the rebels. Huseinov and his supporters rejected quickly the president's offer to negotiate and reiterated their demands for the resignation of the top authorities. Although the Prime Minister and parliament speaker agreed to step down, Huseinov's forces began to March on Baku and President Elchibey was forced to invite a figure (Hyder Aliyev) from Azerbaijan's past to the capital in an effort to avert civil war.

Hyder Aliyev had a long and distinguished past in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. In the 1960s, he served as head of the Azerbaijani KGB before being elected as First Secretary of the republic's Communist Party in 1969. Aliyev was made deputy chairman of the USSR council of ministers in 1982, only to be sacked from the politburo by Gorbachev five years later.

⁴² Elizabeth Fuller, "Military Revolt in Azerbaijan", *RFE/RL News Briefs* 2, No. 25 (7-11 June 1993): 6-7.

The Azerbaijani official returned to his native Nakhichevan in 1990, and in September 1991 he was elected chairman of the autonomous region's parliament. Following the breakup of the USSR, Aliyev ruled Nakhichevan as his own private fiefdom, cultivating commercial ties with Turkey and Iran. Isolated from the post-Soviet political intrigues in Baku, Aliyev became one of Azerbaijan's most popular politicians.⁴³

Hoping perhaps to strengthen his regime's sagging favour, President Elchibey held talks with Aliyev in Baku during the second week of June on a possible power-sharing arrangement. After declining the post of Prime Minister, Aliyev agreed to accept nomination as chairman of the Supreme Soviet, a position that would have given him broad powers over the government. Aliyev was voted to the post on 15 June, and he made an immediate appeal to Huseinov and his supporters to end their revolt peacefully so the process of national reconciliation could begin. The rebels pressed forward towards the capital, however, and Elchibey chose to flee after being informed that the military would not intervene to stop them.

Elchibey's departure from Baku left an opening for Aliyev to seize the reins of power in Azerbaijan, and he was made acting

⁴³ Elizabeth Fuller, "Azerbaijan: Hyder Aliyev's Political Comeback", *RFE/RL Research Report* 2, No. 5 (29 January 1993): 6, 9.

president on 19th June. Having no quarrel with each other, Aliyev and Huseinov commenced negotiations on a power-sharing arrangement, and it was agreed that the latter would become Prime Minister and head of the military and the internal security ministry.⁴⁴ Thus, what began as a revolt by a local warlord ended with a coup d'etat and a major realignment of the political forces in Azerbaijan.⁴⁵ Supporters of the Azerbaijani Popular Front, as well as many observers in the west alleged that Russia had a hand in the events of June. There are many observers who suspect Russian hand in the chain of events leading to the ascent of Hyder Aliyev to the highest seat of power in Baku. The new man at the helm of affairs was a major respite for Russia from the anti Russian/CIS inclination of Elchibey. Among the first changes enacted by Aliyev as the president was a major reorientation of Azerbaijani foreign policy. Now the wheel had turned full cycle. Elchibey's pro-Turkey, anti Russian policies went into a tailspin and Azerbaijani foreign policy took a u turn with the signing of the proposed oil deal with western companies.⁴⁶ In lieu of Turkey, Aliyev sought initially to make ties with Russia the focus of Azerbaijan's external relations. This new found orientation was

⁴⁴ "Veteran Communist Crowns a Comeback in Azerbaijan", *New York Times* (1 July 1993): A2.

⁴⁵ Soon after coming to power, Aliyev began a major crackdown against the APF. The front's offices were raided on 17 July, and dozens of its supporters were arrested. "Azerbaijan Crackdown widens", *New York Times* (18 July 1993): 10.

⁴⁶ Mayak Radio Network, 29 June 1993, in *FBIS-SOV*, # 93-124 (30 June 1993): 71.

manifest in a major policy directive by Aliyev in the first month of his presidency.

Aliyev's love for Russia is manifested in his declaration that "all our relations (with Russia), not only economic, must be consolidated, and the ones lost must be restored," President Aliyev announced his country's intention to join the Russian-dominated Commonwealth of Independent State on 7th September 1993⁴⁷ after pledging to see to it personally that Azerbaijan's independence and sovereignty would not be compromised. Aliyev lobbied the Azerbaijani parliament to approve CIS membership. Two weeks later Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev welcomed the decisions as "very timely and good", no doubt because it signaled the return of Azerbaijan to the Russian fold.

The impact of this change in political leadership was also felt on the battlefield. The Karabakh Armenians took advantage of the June disarray in Baku to expand the scope of their military operations with a 12th June attack on *Agdam*, a large Azerbaijani city to the east of Nagorno-Karabakh with the stated aim of silencing the artillery and missile positions from which *stepankert* and surrounding towns had been shelled. Ethnic Armenian forces sought, in effect, to establish a security zone by capturing *Agdam*

⁴⁷ Quoted by ITAR-TASS, 7 September 1993, in *FBIS-SOV*, # 93-172 (8 September 1993): 7.

and other towns ringing the eastern border of the former NKAO. After five weeks of fierce fighting, *Agdam* fell to Armenian troops on 23rd July, thus marking the seizure of additional Azerbaijani territory outside Nagorno-Karabakh.

A Turkish diplomatic initiative at the United Nations resulted in UN Security Council Resolution 853 adopted on 29th July 1993. Similar to resolution 822 of the previous April, 853 upheld the principle of the inviolability of international borders, condemned the fighting, and called for an immediate cease-fire and withdrawal of “occupying forces” from Azerbaijani territory.

The massive success of Karabakh Armenians vis-à-vis Azerbaijanis put Aliyev in a tight position. Armenian gains in the conflict zone were diluting the prestige of Aliyev. Realizing the immediate need of launching massive assault on the enemy, Azerbaijani troops went for the kills, registering some noticeable gains.

The Azerbaijani success in late 1993 and early 1994 had a significant impact on the hostilities. After a brief April 1994 offensive by local Armenian forces intended ostensibly to regain lost territory, the warring parties agreed to a termination of military operations on 12th May 1994. Notwithstanding the sporadic violations, the ceasefire has held to the present. With the establishment of a viable ceasefire in the conflict zone, the

business of negotiation began in earnest. However, the peace process, like the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict itself, became more than just an affair among the warring parties. External actors with their own geopolitical agenda became involved, and each attempted to influence the process according to that agenda. The achievement of a cease-fire in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict zone in May 1994 set the stage for difficult negotiations mediated by a host of global actors. Lawmakers from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Russia, Kyrgyzstan and the self styled NKP commenced negotiations in the Kyrgyzstan capital on 4th May under the aegis of the CIS Interparliamentary Assembly. A protocol was proposed that called for a cease-fire to begin on 8th May, to be followed by supplementary talks on the disengagement of the warring parties, withdrawal of military forces from occupied territories, discontinuation of energy and transportation blockades, return of refugees and prisoners of war, and resolution of Nagorno-Karabakh's final legal status.⁴⁸

The first stirring of a renewed CSCE role in Karabakh mediation process emerged in the aftermath of the Bishkek meeting. In mid May 1994, Minsk Group chairman Jan Eliasson shuttled back and forth between Yerevan and Baku in an effort to convince the sides not to accept hastily the most recent draft of Russian peace plan-a plan that minimized the CSCE's role.

⁴⁸ Interfax, 5 May 1994, in *FBIS-SOV*, # A-088 (6 May 1994): 1

By the middle of 1994, a comprehensive draft plan for a political settlement of the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict was taking shape in Moscow. Eliasson ventured to the Russian capital in late June, presumably in hope of having at least, some of the CSCE's role as minimal as possible, claiming that there is no alternative to the Russian draft. Details of Russia's plan for a comprehensive political settlement began to emerge by the end of July. In essence, the document envisaged a six part process by which a resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute would be achieved. Because the document's provisions offered revealing insights into Moscow's objectives in the region, a brief summary of its elements is necessary:

1. Withdrawal of all military forces to a separating distance of 5 to 20 kilometers with 3 days of the accord's signing, followed by the pullout of American troops from the *Agdam* and *Fizulil* districts of Azerbaijan and the deployment of primarily Russian disengagement forces in the separation strip.⁴⁹
2. Withdrawal of Armenian units from *Jebrail* within 10 days, followed by the exchange of prisoners of war, the lifting of all transportation, communication, and energy blockades, and the return of Azeri refugees and police units of the *Agdam* and *Fizuli* districts.

⁴⁹ Interfax, 22 July 1994, in *FBIS-SOV*, # 94-142 (25 July 1994): 68.

3. Withdrawal of Armenian forces from the *Zangelan* district within 15 days.
4. Withdrawal of Armenian units from the *Kubatly* district within 20 days followed by the commencement of repair and restoration of transportation links in affected areas and the return of Azerbaijani police units of *Jebrail* and *Zangelan*.
5. Withdrawal of Armenian forces from the *Kelbajar* district within 28 days, followed by the return there of Azerbaijani police; restoration of the all transportation, communication, and energy links within 1 month.
6. Discussion of the ultimate legal and administrative status of Nagorno-Karabakh for an undefined period beginning at the time of the accord's signing.

Although unstated, the plan assumed a commanding role for Russia in the negotiation process both leading up to and following its signing, thereby strengthening Moscow in its quest to become the chief guarantor of peace and stability in the former Soviet Union. However, because the draft settlement was indeed only a draft, its provisions became the subject of heated debate over the next several months as the warring sides argued their relative positions and the CSCE tried to clarify and expand its role.

The Moscow talks ended on 13th August without agreement on the draft plan. Importantly however, all the three parties endorsed the idea of "International peacekeepers" being dispatched to the conflict zone, but the size and composition of the force and the timetable for the deployment were left for future discussion.⁵⁰

Russia's attempt to emerge as the dominant peacemaker in the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict made little real headway in the late summer of 1994. While the draft comprehensive political agreement was a creation of Moscow, the conflicting parties continued to adopt stances that precluded compromise, and the CSCE took on a more active role in the negotiation process that was unwelcome by Russian officials. A further obstacle to Russia's designs in the region was erected in late September with the conclusion of the long-delayed oil contract between Azerbaijan and a consortium of mostly western oil companies.

Head of state and government from the fifty-three member states of the CSCE met in Budapest on 5th and 6th December 1994 to discuss strengthening the body's role in the resolution of conflicts in Europe and the Former Soviet Union. Among the issues dealt with were the conflict in Bosnia and the future of

⁵⁰ Elizabeth Fuller, "Karabakh Mediation Update", *RFE/RL Daily Report*, No. 154 (16 August 1994).

European security arrangements. But the dispute over Nagorno-Karabakh took centre stage.

The Budapest Summit concluded on 6th December with the approval of a document changing the CSCE's name to that of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). Regarding the Armenia-Azerbaijan clash, the document contained two crucial provisions. First, support was expressed for the four UN Security Council resolutions on Nagorno-Karabakh that called for the liberation of occupied Azerbaijani territory and speedy negotiation towards political settlement under OSCE auspices was urged. Second, the document called for the deployment of a multinational OSCE peacekeeping force following agreement between the warring parties on a peace settlement.⁵¹

The Budapest summit marked a watershed in the Karabakh conflict. This summit helped in the piecing together of an institutional set up to guarantee peace in the Nagorno-Karabakh. By the end of 1994, the frantic efforts for peace started paying dividends. Violence was substantially reduced if not stopped between two warring parties. The turbulent years of 1992-94 marking the deadly phase in Nagorno-Karabakh conflict came to an end and renewed emphasis was laid on the putting in place of

⁵¹ Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, "Towards a Genuine partnership in a New Era: Final Decision of the 1994 Budapest Summit", OSCE Doc. RC/1/95 (21 December 1994).

a constitutional democracy in Azerbaijan. The political development which took place during 1992-94 got clouded in the heat and dust of Karabakh struggle. As this dust was cleared a great bit by the end of 1994, efforts were made to usher in an era of constitutional democracy in Azerbaijan. Year 1995 marked a great progress on this front. This analysis of the evolution of constitutional democracy in Azerbaijan has however been dealt with in the next chapter.

CHAPTER - IV

EVOLUTION OF CONSTITUTIONAL DEMOCRACY IN AZERBAIJAN –1995

The reinforcing processes of state-building and political consolidation started in Azerbaijan in earnest in about 1994-95. In the first years of independence, central authority had been weakened by a series of developments from both within and from the outside that had largely taken away its ability to rule. Internally, intensifying ethnic tensions, lawlessness, hyperinflation, and lack of a predictable pattern of civil-military relations stunted the birth of indigenous political institutions, which were themselves at the mercy of competing, ambitious politicians. Externally, the collapse of the Soviet Union and Russia's subsequent role as a regional hegemon, Armenia's occupation of the Nagorno-Karabakh district, and rivalries between Iran, Turkey, and Russia only intensified the chaos that prevailed inside Azerbaijan. Among other things, the turmoil facilitated the rise of a number of ambitious individuals, one of whom, Hyder Aliyev, was able to take advantage of the unfolding events and steadily rise to the pinnacle of power once again. A known and savvy politician with a knack for administration, once elected president, Aliyev systematically set out to purge his opponents by sending them to prison or to exile in Moscow, draft a

Constitution with a strong presidency, and to appoint members of his inner circle and his New Azerbaijan Party to the different institutions of the state. To succeed politically, Aliyev had earlier attended, as much as possible, to problems with the economy and with Armenia. These efforts of Aliyev came after the traumatic experience of transition of the early years. After the chaos and political instability of early years after independence, things started taking a definite shape by the year 1995 when a new constitution was adopted and elections were held under the supervision of OSCE.

It is in the background of such far-reaching changes that the present chapter attempts to take a look at the evolution of constitutional democracy in Azerbaijan. The idea here is to take a stock of the progress of Azerbaijan on the front of emergence of democratic Leadership in a multi-party system, establishment of Constitutional set up and holding of Election in a liberal democratic framework, three fundamental parameters of the health of a democracy. Accordingly, this chapter has been divided into three sections each dealing with one pillar of a nascent state struggling to put both a nation and institutions in order.

The Emergence of Democratic Leadership

In November, 1989 Moscow dissolved its special Karabakh commission, while maintaining its 6,000 troops in the Nagorno-

Karabakh enclave. This angered Armenia, which expelled its ethnic Azeris. Their arrival in Baku led to widespread anti-Armenian riots in January 1990. Popular Front leaders demanded the government's resignation. Moscow rushed its troops to Baku to quell the uprising, during which 131 Azeris were killed. The discredited Communist Party's First Secretary, Abdul Rahman Vazirov, gave way to Ayaz Mutalibov, chairman of the council of ministers. Mutalibov resigned after two years, but only after according the Popular Front party parity with the neo-Communists¹. In September 1990, the Popular Front boycotted the parliamentary poll because it was held under a state of emergency imposed in January; the Communist Party won 91 per cent of the 360 seats. Shortly after the failed August 1991 coup attempt in Moscow, the Azeri parliament declared Azerbaijan independent. One week later, at Mutalibov's initiative, the Communist Party dissolved itself permanently. The Popular Front boycotted the new presidential election because the state of emergency was still in force. Mutalibov, the sole candidate², won 98 per cent of the vote on a 70 per cent turnout. This gave him confidence to ignore the strong anti-Moscow feelings among Azeris, due to the January 1990

¹ Joseph Kechichian and Theodore Karasik. "The crisis in Azerbaijan: How Clans Influence the Politics of an Emerging Republic" , *Middle East Policy*, vol.4, nos 1-2, (1995), pp 57-71.

² Tadeusz Swietochowski , "Azerbaijan: A Borderland At Crossroads of History" , in Fredrick Starr, ed., *The Legacy of History in Russia and The New State of Eurasia* (London: M.E. Sharpe, 1994), p.292.

events, and join the Russia-led Commonwealth of Independent State (CIS) on December 21 1991.

With the break-up of the Soviet Union ten days later, the old Soviet military units posted in Azerbaijan, Karabakh, and Armenia became CIS units. As they withdrew from Karabakh in February 1992, fighting between the Azeris and Armenians escalated. When the Azeris lost Karabakh, the Popular Front rallied popular opinion. Mutalibov dissolved parliament and appointed a 50-member National Council, divided equally between neo-communist and the Popular Front. When the Azeris military performance did not improve; the National Council became embroiled in an acrimonious debate. Mutalibov resigned in March, and the chairman of the National Council became acting president.

Moscow disapproved of the rise of the Popular Front at Mutalibov's expense. With covert backing from Moscow, Mutalibov regained power³ on May 12 and declared his intention to take Azerbaijan into the Collective Defense Treaty to be signed at the CIS summit three days later. The Popular Front organized demonstrations in Baku. Mutalibov, who had not foreseen popular resistance, fled to Moscow and Isa Gambrov, a Popular Front supporter, became acting president.

³ Shireen T.Hunter, "Azerbaijan: Searching for new neighbors", in Ian B and Ray Taurus(ed.) *New States ,New Politics*(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,1997),p.446

Now Moscow decided to back fully the Armenians in the Karabakh conflict. Using CIS troops stationed in Armenia and Azerbaijan, it diverted arms and military expertise to Armenia through the Russian-dominated units. Soon the Armenians seized Lachin, halfway in the seven-mile corridor connecting Karabakh with Armenia⁴.

Abulfaz Elchibey campaigned for the Azeri presidency and pledged to liberate Karabakh in six months. He promised democracy, human rights, and new parliamentary and local elections. Favouring defence alliances with Turkey and the US, he pledged to withdraw Azerbaijan from the CIS. He criticized Iran, and vowed to keep the state and religion separate. Elchibey won 57 per cent of the vote. Hyder Aliyev, a 69-year – old Azeri politician who was on the Soviet Politburo from 1976-1987, had the potential of winning the election. But he was excluded because of a constitutional provision barring candidates aged 65-plus.

Elchibey, an academic, lasted a year.⁵ He showed a lack of administrative, political, and diplomatic skills. He also failed to grasp the geopolitics of Azerbaijan, trapped as it is between powerful neighbours to the north (Russia) and South (Iran) without

⁴ For details see, Human Rights Watch, *Azerbaijan: Seven Years of Conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh*(New York: Human Rights Watch,1994)

⁵ For a detailed analysis of these issues ,see Shireen T. Hunter , *The Transcaucasus in Transition : Nation-Building and Conflict*(Washington,DC.and Boulder Colorado: Center for Strategic and International Studies/West view Press,1994)

whose cooperation it cannot export oil and its long-time foe to the west (Armenia). He tried to reorient Azerbaijan in a way that overlooked not only its history since 1917, but also unchanging geostrategic realities. He turned his back on Moscow by trying to integrate his country into the orbit of America and Turkey. He remained committed to pan-Turkism, the political unity of all Turkic lands from the Balkans to China, ignoring the division of the trans-continental Turkic lands by the Zangezur region, allocated to Armenia in 1923⁶.

In October, Elchibey withdrew Azerbaijan from the CIS, destroying the geographical continuity of the organisation, which had since its inception lacked Georgia. Incensed, Moscow resolved to strengthen Armenia. But, inspired by Elchibey, the newly-formed Azeri army regained a quarter of Karabakh by the end of 1992. The economic price, however, proved unbearable, with the military consuming one-third of the national budget. In the first quarter of 1993, aided by Moscow, the Armenians recovered the lost territory and established a second corridor between Karabakh and Armenia. By early June, thousands of Azeri refugees had gathered in Ganja, the base of Colonel Suret Huseinov. Huseinov had earlier been blamed by Elchibey for the military setbacks and was dismissed. On June 4, Elchibey ordered an attack on his forces. Huseinov

⁶ On the dilemmas of identity in the post Soviet Republic of Azerbaijan, see *Caucasian Regional Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (1996), (<http://poli.vub.ac.be/publi/crs/feng/0301-04>)

repulsed the assault and, with the tacit endorsement of Moscow, advanced on Baku.

To avoid catastrophic internecine violence, Gambrov resigned as the National Council chairman to make way for Aliyev, who was backed by all 25 neo-Communists and nine Popular Front members. Having failed to secure the support of the military hierarchy, Elchibey fled Baku and the National Council gave presidential powers to Aliyev. The political turmoil in Azerbaijan provided fresh opportunity for Armenians on the battlefield. It was not until early September 1993 that, during his visit to the Kremlin, Aliyev was able to establish working relations with his former politburo colleague Russian President Boris Yeltsin⁷. The price was the Azeri National Council's decision to join not only the CIS but also its Collective Defense Treaty. It was against this background that a presidential election was held on October 3. With the Popular Front boycotting the poll, Aliyev secured 99 per cent of the vote with the official claim of 90 per cent voter turnout⁸.

If Aliyev estimated that by joining the CIS and the Collective Defense Treaty, and additionally signing a bilateral security agreement with Moscow, he had won Russia's neutrality in the Karabakh conflict, he was mistaken. When Armenians seized more

⁷ Karen Dawisha and Bruce Parrott, *Russia and the New States of Eurasia: The Politics of Upheaval*(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994)

⁸ Foreign diplomats put the voter turn-out at 50 percent. See Dilip Hiro, *Between Marx and Muhammad: The Changing Face of Central Asia*, Harper Perennial, New York, 1995, p.382, note 6.

Azeri territory in later October, raising the total to 20 per cent of Azerbaijan under Armenian control and four times the area of Karabakh, Aliyev appealed to Moscow for help, but in vain.

This led Aliyev to devise a complex strategy⁹. To consolidate his power at home he decided to strengthen the Azeri military with foreign expertise and to resist Moscow's demand to post its troops along the front line as peacekeepers. He also kept the diplomatic door open. During the CIS summit in Moscow in September 1994, he met Armenian President Levon Ter-Petrossian, who refused to vacate the Lachin corridor under any circumstances. To consolidate his political base Aliyev created a new movement, the Party of New Azerbaijan (PONA). To placate Moscow, he instructed the State Oil Company of Azerbaijan to allocate 10 per cent of the shares of the Azerbaijan International Operating Consortium (AIOC) to Lukoil, a Russian company.

In the November 1995 parliamentary election, Aliyev's PONA captured more than three-quarters of the 124 seats. The poll, which coincided with a referendum on the new constitution, was free, but hardly fair, as the state-controlled media gave immense publicity to PONA.

⁹ Leila Aliyeva, *Political Leadership Strategies in Azerbaijan*, (1995) (<http://socrates.berkeley.edu/bsp/caucasus/aliyeva.html>)

The Establishment of Constitutional set up

One of the most important steps toward institutionalising political power was taken in late 1995 with the drafting of a new constitution. Up until then, the 1978 Constitution had remained in effect, except as amended by the Independence Act of October 18, 1991. A Constitutional Commission was convened by President Aliyev in June 1995 and worked on a draft constitution until the following November. The Commission released its first draft to the public on October 15 for fifteen days of national discussion, ahead of a popular referendum on the document set for November 12, 1995. The document's final version was supposed to be presented to the public ten days before the referendum, i.e. November 2, but was only released on November 8.¹⁰ The Constitution was overwhelmingly approved four days later and came into force on November 27.

Article 1 of the Constitution stipulates that "the people of Azerbaijan shall be sole source of state power". The people can exercise their power through referendum, which is the only method of amending or revising the Constitution (Article 3). Other Articles, for example 4 and 6, provide strong guarantees against the absence of representative government and "usurpation of power"

¹⁰ Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, *Report on Azerbaijan's November 1995 Parliamentary Election*: Baku, Lenkoran, Lerik, (1996) (<http://www.house.gov/csce/azrbelctrpt.html>)

respectively, and Chapter 3, entitled “Major Rights, Freedoms and Responsibilities”, enshrines a whole host of other liberties. At the same time, the Constitution provides for a strong executive with extensive powers. The President is the Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces (Article 9) and can appoint and dismiss the Prime Minister and members of his cabinet, appoint judges, and appoint or remove the Prosecutor General (Article 109). The President also has the power to declare martial law or a state of emergency (Articles 111 and 112) and to set up “special guard services” (Article 109). The president has “the right of immunity” and his or her “honour and dignity” is protected by law (Article 106). If guilty of a “grave crime”, the President can be removed from office by a vote of a majority of ninety-five deputies in the parliament (out of a total of 125), and the removal resolution must be ratified by the Constitutional Court.¹¹

In contrast to the executive, the powers of the unicameral legislature, the *Milli Mejlis*, are not extensive. It meets for only seven months in a year, from February 1 to May 31 and September 30 to December 30, (Article 88), and is largely given a reactive role in relation to the presidency. Article 95, for example, lists a number of “issues solved by the *Milli Mejlis*” “upon the representation of the President”; ratification of military doctrine and the state budget,

¹¹ An English translation of the Azerbaijani constitution is available online at, <http://www.constitutional.org/const-contents.html>.

appointment of judges to the Constitutional and Supreme Courts, and removing judges, to name a few. Nevertheless, the legislature, whose members serve five-year terms, can also initiate impeachment proceedings against the President, upon the recommendation of the Constitutional Court, and its members have personal immunity while in office, unless “caught red-handed” (Article 90)¹². The Constitution also enshrines the principles of judicial independence and immunity (Articles 127 and 128), and makes provisions for a nine-judge Constitutional Court to ensure that the actions of the various bodies of the state conform with the Constitution (Article 130).

While the Constitution is tremendously important in outlining the basic institutions of the state and their functions, its practical implementation and interpretation depends overwhelmingly on the actual balance of power among the various institutions of the state, a balance that had already begun to emerge in favour of the presidency at the time the document was drafted.¹³ To begin with, the President himself presided over the Commission charged with drafting the Constitution, and many of the articles related to the powers of the executive (99 to 124) seem to reflect Aliyev’s own preferences. At the same time, in addition to the powers officially granted to him by the Constitution, by 1995 the President had

¹² *ibid*

¹³ For details see, Cynthia Croissant, *Azerbaijan, Oil and Geopolitics*, (Commack, NY: Nova Science, 1998)

already emerged as the dominant power-broker inside the country. With the overall framework of the state and his own actions and powers legitimized by the Constitution, he now set out to ensure that those institutions on which the state relied for power were not only pliant but, indeed, supportive of his own hold on power. The armed forces, the bureaucracy, and the legislature were the most important of such institutions.

The attempted coups and the ensuing purges¹⁴ gave President Aliyev the perfect opportunity to ensure the dominance of civilian state institutions over the military. This process had already gotten underway with the conclusion of the cease-fire agreement with Armenia earlier, thus pushing the armed forces further out of the limelight. The President, in the meanwhile, made his own appointments to the armed forces, and, in repeated statements, cautioned that "the army must always remain outside politics".¹⁵ In October 1996, Aliyev convened a public conference on the nation's political process, ostensibly to discuss the events of the past two years. Again he warned that treason and "crimes against the state" would not be tolerated and outlined the punishments of arrested coup plotters. At the same time, if reports in the Baku press are to be given any credibility, the state appears to have let conditions among the army's rank-and-file deteriorate, not so much as an act

¹⁴ *Azerbaijanis Indicted Over 1995 Coup Attempt Jailed* in FBIS-SOV-97-345, December 15, 1997.
¹⁵ "Azerbaijan: Aliyev Demands Stronger Discipline in Armed Forces", *Interfax*, (October 9, 1996), in FBIS-SOV-96-198, October 11, 1996.

of deliberate punishment but as a subtle way of ensuring soldiers' subservience.¹⁶ With reports of deplorable conditions in army bases, military service lost even more luster and thus more of its potential as a venue for political ambition. Empty stomachs, also, are seldom conducive to widespread rebellion.

A career apparatchik, President. Aliyev instead turned much of his attention to party-building and to staffing the bureaucracy with trusted friends and associates. Especially important in this regard has been the New Azerbaijan Party (NAP), an organisation Aliyev established not long before coming to power in 1993. By this time, the Popular Front (PF) had already established itself as a viable and popular political organisation, although this popularity was becoming increasingly eroded due to the chronic political instability and territorial losses that marked Elchibey's term in office. From his home region of Nakhichevan, where he commanded respect and popularity, Aliyev started attracting into his own organisation other well-known personalities who were either not members of the PF or were disenchanted with it. The Popular Front's steady demise only enhanced the popularity of the NAP. Before long, following the 1993 presidential elections, it became obvious that membership in the NAP was an important factor in administrative appointments and promotions. The party's control

¹⁶ Sh. Mursaloglu. "Defense Ministry Condemns Mass Media for Negative Reports About situation in Armed Forces", *Zerkalo*, (Baku) (September 12, 1998), in FBIS-SOV-98-265, September 22, 1998.

over the highest echelons of the state became near-complete following the legislative elections of November 1995 and February 1996, when its own members won 67 of the 125 seats, and almost all of the other seats went to smaller parties or individuals supportive of its platform.¹⁷ The election law also worked to the NAP's advantage, as it allowed 15% of deputies (19 seats) to retain their jobs, including government posts, while running for parliament. Some of these same officials were also put in charge of overseeing the fairness of the elections.¹⁸ By the late 1990s, few of the bureaucratic heads were not party members. President Aliyev's personal dominance within the party grew correspondingly, reaching a climax in December 1999, when in internal elections during the Party's Congress the President's son, Ilham, was elected as one of its five Vice Presidents¹⁹

President Aliyev actively sought to cultivate an image of indispensability to the political system. In fact, while at one level he cultivated an image of indispensability, at another level he actually made himself central to the continued operations of the state. The President's portraits adorn each inch of the land, showing him in a

¹⁷ The Popular Front won 4 seats. Four other opposition parties were barred from participating in the elections, and many independent candidates were disqualified. A number of other similar parties either boycotted the elections or did not have enough of a viable support base to fill candidates. At last count, there were more than 30 political parties in existence in Azerbaijan, though fewer than a handful actually qualify as such.

¹⁸ Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, *Report on Azerbaijan's November 1995 Parliamentary Elections*.

¹⁹ Ilham Aliyev has started a website for himself in which he rates his own popularity as compared with that of other notable Azeris, excluding, of course his father. The address of this website is <http://www.ilham-aliyev.com>

variety of poses. There is another dimension to the President's dominance of the system that goes beyond pictures and symbols. The President actually does dominate the political system.

As the preceding analysis demonstrates, political consolidation has taken place largely under the personal guidance and control of Hyder Aliyev. Aliyev initiated, and largely succeeded in, the process of state-building. From 1993, when he first came to power, to the end of his first term in office in 1998, Azerbaijan was transformed from what Robert Jackson calls a *quasi-state*²⁰ into a full-blown, viable political entity, surpassing most expectations, including the World Bank's. Much of the credit for this transformation goes to none other than Aliyev himself, who in the process deftly consolidated his own hold on power. The President achieved this by first ending the war with Armenia (although not Armenia's occupation of Nagorno-Karabakh). With the help of the World Bank, he then gave some order to the economy by bringing the spiraling inflation under control and stabilizing prices. He also neutralized the army and purged it of elements with their own political agendas. With the pre-conditions for political consolidation thus taken care of the President then set out to institutionalise his rule both constitutionally and systemically through the New Azerbaijan Party and the bureaucracy. The Political process and

²⁰ Robert Jackson, *Quasi State: Sovereignty, International Relation and Third World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p.21

the system that have emerged as a result have certain particular characteristics. Politics, for example, has become largely non-ideological, revolving instead around personality contests and the real meaning of democracy.

On paper, the Constitution outlines a system that is democratic, republican, has checks and balances, and a strong executive who is, nevertheless, ultimately accountable to the Constitutional Court and the legislature. In practice, however, the executive's relative constitutional strengths in relation to other branches of the state have turned into the presidency's domination of the whole system. The judiciary's independence is undermined by the President's ability to remove judges and the Prosecutor General from office. The parliament, already dominated by the President's party and other "independent" supporters, embarks on few politically contentious initiatives of its own and often simply passes the bills proposed by the executive after a perfunctory debate.

The opposition, meanwhile, has been all but shut out of the political process. Despite the Popular Front's marginal representation in the parliament, few Azeris today openly declare their membership in or support for the party, reluctant to risk their

next job promotion or appointment²¹. But political considerations aside, the declining popularity of the opposition is not a simple function of fear of the risks involved. Aliyev's administration has indeed had considerable success in a number of areas, especially in putting an end to the lawlessness of the early 1990s and in restoring law and order. From 1994 to 1999, for example, some 16,000 of the weapons that had fallen into private hands were turned in to official agencies. The Popular Front can hardly question the government's track record on crime prevention, in the same way as it cannot criticize Aliyev's relative successes on the economic front and in relation to the Karabakh conflict.

Holding of Multi-Party Election

Azerbaijan's 12 November 1995, parliamentary election and constitutional referendum represented an attempt to create a permanent legislative body within the framework of a new fundamental law that corresponds to Azerbaijan's status as an independent state.²²

The Political background to the 12 November vote was, unusually unstable, characterized by extra-constitutional changes of government, and frequent coup attempts, with the alleged

²¹ Mehran Kamrava , "State-Building in Azerbaijan: The Search for Consolidation" , *Middle East Journal*, Vol.55, No.2, Spring 2001, p.234

²² OSCE/UN Joint Electoral Observation Mission in Azerbaijan on Azerbaijan's 12 November 1995 Parliamentary Election and Constitutional Referendum

involvement of outside powers. Consequently, the election sought to create stable structures of government that would enjoy domestic respect and legitimacy, and would create a parliamentary forum for political competition with clear rules of the game. By inviting the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the United Nations (UN) to organise observation of the election, Azerbaijan's Government also sought to consolidate its legitimacy in the eyes of the international community, and to gain international recognition of its progress towards democracy.

President Aliyev repeatedly stressed his personal commitment to holding free and fair elections as an integral aspect of transforming Azerbaijan into a democratic, pluralistic society. Efforts to hold free and fair elections, however, have taken place in a complicated context of mutual distrust between the Government and opposition parties.

The series of coups since 1992, and related grievances between victors and vanquished, determined the nature of relations between the Government of President Hyder Aliyev and opposition parties led by the Popular Front of Azerbaijan (PFA) and Musavat, whose leaders were in power from June 1992 to June 1993. For these opposition parties, Elchibey²³ was still the *Leader*.

²³ A thorough account of Elchibey's Presidency and the events leading to his overthrow can be found in Dilip Hiro, *Between Marx and Muhammad*

President Aliyev, for his part, occasionally accused the Popular Front of being a terrorist organisation that has tried to overthrow or assassinate him, a charge echoed by various Government ministers. It was not certain, therefore, until shortly before the election process began that the Popular Front would be allowed to take part. Ultimately, the PFA was able to hold a congress in August, at which it changed its status from a movement to a party, in order to meet requirements for participation.

Government relations had not been as tense with the other leading opposition party, Musavat. However, Musavat's leader, Isa Gambar, the Speaker of Parliament during the Popular Front's tenure, is still technically barred from leaving Baku and faces possible criminal indictment for responsibility for deaths caused during Surat Huseinov's June 1993 rebellion. The more moderate Party of National Independence, headed by Etibar Mamedov, though publicly critical of the Government, enjoys much better relations with the authorities.

Various members of the Popular Front and Musavat who were candidates on their party lists were jailed²⁴. The authorities arrested Parliamentary deputy Tofik Gasimov, a physicist, former foreign minister under the Elchibey Government, and number two on the party list of Musavat. He was charged with treason and attempting

²⁴ OSCE/UN report

to overthrow the Government by force during the March 1995 events. Popular Front activists Faraj Guliev and Arif Pashayev (numbers five and six on the popular Front's party list) were in prison. Guliev was charged with attempting to overthrow Hyder Aliyev when the latter chaired the legislature of Nakhichevan; Pashayev was accused of escaping from a KGB prison. Apart from Musavat and Popular Front activists, the police, on 2 October 1995, arrested Sabutay Gadjiev, leader of the Party of Labour. He was charged with treason and attempting to stage an armed overthrow of the Government. This party has had acknowledged links to former President Ayaz Mutalibov.

Newspapers of all political parties, the independent press and other media have been subject to political censorship, which the authorities conceded in private conversations. Government officials, however, only acknowledged military censorship, pointing to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict²⁵. While all parties agreed that political censorship eased before the election, journalists reported as of 1 November that it was still in effect.

Related to issues of censorship, on 3 October the trial of four journalists of the satirical newspaper Cheshme began. They were arrested in March 1995 on charges of insulting the honour and dignity of the President. Two of the journalists were on the Popular

²⁵ ibid

Front's party list. In October, three received prison terms of five, three and two years, and one was sentenced to police supervision. On the eve of the 12 November election, the journalists were amnestied.

Opposition parties and candidates frequently pointed to censorship and the above-mentioned arrests, as well as others, as evidence of the state's intention to clamp down on society, and restrict access to the political process. They claimed that the elections were taking place in an atmosphere of fear and intimidation.²⁶

As far as electoral law is concerned Parliament passed the electoral law on 12 August, 1995. The law established a 125-seat, unicameral Parliament to serve a five-year term, with 100 representatives elected on a majority basis and 25 seats distributed to political parties on a proportional basis.

The Central Election Commission (CEC) was responsible for administering the Constitutional referendum and the Parliamentary elections. President Aliyev, in accordance with the law, appointed the CEC's Chairman, Jafar Veliev, in August 1995. Chairman Veliev, in turn, selected the 14 other members. At his request, Parliament approved increasing the CEC's membership, on 3

²⁶ For details see, Michael Ochs, *Azerbaijan: Oil, Domestic Stability and Geopolitics in the caucasus*. (1996), (<http://www.ksg.harvard.edu/csia/sdi/ochs.html>)

October 1995, from 15 to 20. The law requires the Commission to be a neutral body and prohibits representatives of political parties from serving as members.

The CEC also oversaw District Election Commissions (DECs), and nominated their chairpersons, whom Parliament approved. DECs consisted of 12 members not affiliated with any political party and selected by lot. They were responsible for organizing the election of the district representative and overseeing the work of the Precinct Election Commissions (PECs).

PECs had between six and eighteen members, and served between 50 and 1,500 eligible voters. Twenty percent of the members of PECs were representatives of candidates, 30 per cent were members of political parties and the remaining 50 per cent were representatives of state enterprises and entities. Although the electoral law called for PECs to be established by 15 September 1995, the 50 per cent who were representatives of political parties and candidates were only selected after the CEC announced the list of candidates on 19 October. These members had a residency requirement and were selected by lot. Voters had to vote at the precinct in which they were registered.

The CEC divided the country into 100 electoral constituencies; none could have a population more than 15 per cent greater than any other. Depending on the size of the eligible voting

population, one administrative district could have more than one electoral, while other administrative districts could be combined into one electoral district, but required contiguous borders.

Candidates had to be 25 years of age or older. Whether running independently or affiliated with a political party, they needed 2,000 valid signatures from eligible voters within their district. Candidates had to present identification and other documentation, including a certification of resignation from their current employment.

In order for district elections to be valid, 50 percent of the electorate needed to participate, and a candidate needed more than 50 per cent of the valid votes to be elected. If no candidate received more than 50 per cent of the vote, a run-off election between the two biggest vote-getters would take place two weeks later. If the 50 per cent minimum voter participation requirement was not met, repeat elections would take place within three months of the first round.

The law stipulated that 25 representatives would be elected nationally, through voting for party lists and distributing the seats proportionally among parties that received at least eight percent of the vote nationally. To field a party list, a political party had to be legally registered and to collect 50,000 signatures from eligible voters. A 50 per cent minimum voter turnout was also required

nationally for the election to be valid; otherwise, new elections would take place within six months.

The electoral law permitted representatives of the media, candidates and political parties to observe meetings of election commissions, polling and the vote count. In addition, candidates could designate up to 15—and political parties up to 45 – authorized representatives to be poll watchers and carryout campaign activities.

Candidates and parties could appeal decisions of DEC's to the CEC. CEC decisions could be appealed to the Supreme Court, whose rulings were final and binding. The electoral law also required that decisions be rendered in a timely manner.

In general, the law guaranteed the basic internationally accepted standards for democratic elections²⁷. These included multiple candidacies, freedom of speech and assembly, equal access to the media, the right for candidates and parties to observe the voting and vote count, the right of voters individually and privately to cast ballots, plus an appeal mechanism to redress grievances.

However, in some important aspects, the law was unclear or silent. For example, it does not specify the procedures for validating

²⁷ See, Michael Ochs , *Azerbaijan: Oil, Domestic Stability and Geopolitics in the Caucasus* (1996), (<http://www.ksg.harvard.edu/csia/sdi/ochs.html>)

or excluding candidates' signature lists, nor does it state how many signatures lists candidates and parties were to receive. And no provisions either sanction or prohibit the presence of police and executive branch officials in the polling stations. These lapses, as well as poor or inconsistent application of the law, had a fundamental impact on the electoral campaign and its fairness.

After the re-registration of parties that took place in June, 31 parties remained eligible to participate in the elections. Of them, 12 applied to the CEC for lists to collect the required 50,000 signatures: New Azerbaijan; the Azerbaijan National Independence Party; the Azerbaijan Democratic Independence Party; the Party of the Popular Front of Azerbaijan; the Motherland Party (*Ana Vatan*); the Azerbaijan Democratic Proprietors Party; Alliance in the Name of Azerbaijan; the Azerbaijan National Statehood Party; Umid [Hope]; the party of People's Democracy; the Communist Party; and Musavat. Candidates and political parties had 25 days to collect the requisite signatures, beginning 55 days and concluding 30 days prior to polling.²⁸

Of the 1,040 individual candidates who tried to run, the CEC initially registered 359 by 23 October. The CEC – which had been receiving complaints and appeals directly from candidates, as well

²⁸ The Communist Party actually did not survive the re-registration of parties, because its charter seemed to call for restoration of the USSR, but the party won a subsequent appeal to the Supreme Court.

as from the Mission – claimed to have reinstated those unjustly excluded by DEC. On 31 October, the CEC released a list of another 38 registered candidates. However, the CEC also excluded individuals already registered by DEC. Those disqualified included candidates who had even received stamped protocols attesting to their having collected over 2,000 valid signatures, but whose names nevertheless did not appear in the printed list of registered candidates. Ultimately, of the party-affiliated candidates, many linked with the opposition were excluded.²⁹

On 20 October, the election campaign officially began. The election law originally gave candidates five minutes and parties 45 minutes of campaign time on national television. The CEC later increased the amounts to seven minutes and 60 minutes, respectively.

The OSCE closely followed the political campaign, and was invited by the head of State Television on 18 October to draw the time slots for political parties, but declined, since no representatives of political parties were present. Subsequently, the political parties, the CEC and State Television reached agreement about the distribution of air time.³⁰

²⁹ See, Naomi Collett, "Azerbaijan: Trials of a state in transition", *Middle East International*(February 7, 1997), pp.19-21

³⁰ OSCE/UN Report on Elections in Azerbaijan, 1995

Candidates could appeal to the voters in pre-taped TV spots (the head of State Television explained that live appeals were impossible for “technical reasons”). Several opposition candidates, such as Leyla Yunusova, leader of the Independent Democratic Party, and several Popular Front candidates, had their spots cut and censored. Candidates reported being told that they could not criticize President Aliyev or his policies.

Nevertheless, opposition parties – specifically, the Popular Front, the National Independence Party, and the Party of National Statehood (whose leader went into open opposition to President Aliyev shortly before the election) – campaigned on television. They criticized the Government and its policies, sometimes harshly, on the country’s most important medium of mass communication, singling out official corruption, the cult of President Aliyev,³¹ the absence of economic reform and the difficult living conditions for most of the population. Speaking for the Popular Front, former President Elchibey appealed to voters on television for the first time since his ouster. Only his remarks about calling the state language of the country Turkish, as opposed to Azerbaijani, were censored. The leader of the Party of National Statehood even criticized

³¹ n.19,p233

President Aliyev himself³² and the participation of the President's relatives in the election campaign as candidates.

Apart from campaigning in the media, candidates met with voters, though some complained to the Mission that DEC's and local executive authorities helped arrange meetings for favoured candidates while hampering others.

Perhaps the most sensational aspect of the campaign was the release, on 27 October, of a list of candidates whose victory had allegedly been pre-determined by the authorities. The source of the information was Neimat Panakhov, leader of the Party of National Statehood, and a former state counselor to President Aliyev. Opposition newspapers published the list, which many opposition candidates and parties brought to the OSCE's attention, as evidence of the election's unfairness.

Voting took place on 12 November, in 4,600 polling stations (electoral precincts), from 8.00 hours until 22.00 hours. All Azerbaijani citizens 18 years or older were eligible to vote, including prisoners and military personnel.

The CEC announced on 22 November that 86 per cent of the electorate took part in the referendum for the constitution, and 91.9

³² See *The Emergence of Multi-Party Politics in the Southern Caucasus: Azerbaijan, Perspectives on Central Asia*, vol. II, No. 11, February 1998, Published by Eisenhower Institute's Centre for Political and Strategic Studies.

percent of voters voted in its favour. The CEC also announced that 79.5 percent of the electorate had voted to elect 25 national representatives to the Parliament. Only three of the eight participating parties passed the eight per cent threshold for representation in parliament: New Azerbaijan (President Aliyev's party) won 19 seats; two opposition parties – the Party of the Popular Front and the National Independence Party of Azerbaijan – won three seats each.³³

The race to elect 100 district representatives to Parliament was contested by 386 candidates. In the first round, 71 candidates were elected. Run-offs were necessary in 20 districts because none of the candidates had garnered 50 per cent plus one of the votes.

In eight districts, elections had to be canceled entirely. Four failed to meet the 50 per cent minimum turnout requirement; in three others, voting was annulled due to "violations of the electoral law" and in one district in Ganja city, armed, masked individuals stole all electoral material. New elections in these eight districts had to take place on 4 February 1996.

The new Parliament, though not yet fully constituted, nevertheless had a quorum, with 83 deputies. Even though run-off elections had not yet taken place, parliament was convened for its first session on 24 November. At the session, the former Speaker,

³³ *ibid*

Mr. Rasul Guliev, was re-elected unopposed, with the few representatives of opposition parties abstaining.

On 26 November, 1995, run-off elections took place in 20 of Azerbaijan's 100 electoral districts. The OSCE Mission was particularly interested to see whether the irregularities observed during the first round would be addressed on 26th November.

However, in many other districts, problems observed during the first round continued during the second round. Most international observers noted family voting throughout the country. Conversely, allegations were raised during the second round that in districts where the authorities favoured neither candidate, polling officials prohibited multiple voting so that the elections would not be valid and repeat elections, with new candidates, would be needed.

It appeared to the Mission that the required minimum turnout led election officials in some instances to inflate the number of participating voters, and even to engage in ballot stuffing. In this connection, the Mission's observers again saw representatives of local executive authority in polling stations and DEC's.

According to the CEC, 61 per cent of the electorate took part in the run-off election. In 13 districts, representatives were elected; five districts failed to meet turnout requirements, and in two others, various electoral law violations invalidated the voting. In

these seven districts --apart from the eight districts where elections were annulled on 12 November – repeat elections had to take place on 4 February 1996.

The process of political consolidation³⁴ in Azerbaijan has occurred largely under the auspices of an emerging system best described as “presidential monarchy”. This has taken place following years of political turmoil and the eventual, though gradual, re-establishment of such institutions of the state as the parliament, the bureaucracy, and the presidency. Both constitutionally and practically, the presidency has emerged as the real fountain of power in Azerbaijani politics, and, in the process, President Hyder Aliyev made himself indispensable to the political system. Significant accomplishments in the fields of foreign policy and economics, as well as the elimination of actual and potential rivals in the armed forces and elsewhere, greatly enhanced Aliyev’s powers on the one hand and provided much needed boost to the twin process of nation building and institution building in the country.

³⁴ n.27

CONCLUSION

When we talk of political development in Azerbaijan, we mean western liberal democratic model which calls for elected parliament, independent judiciary, accountable executive, free and fair multi-party elections, vibrant civil society, independent media and constitutionally guaranteed fundamental rights.

Against the above mentioned parameters of democracy, if we try to place Azerbaijan in a category, then it would be a 'presidential monarchy' or at best a 'managed democracy'. The political developments which unfolded in the independent Azerbaijan during 1991-95 led to the establishment of a personality based political set-up where, despite all paraphernalia of modern democracy, power radiates from the command of the president and he actually dominates and controls the system. Constitution grants him extraordinary powers putting to ransom the independence of other organs of government, nullifying in practice the spirit of 'Separation of powers'.

Out of the democratisation experience of Azerbaijan, following points need special mention:-

When Azerbaijan gained independence, it was marked by unstable polity, fragmented society, dilapidated economy, Soviet era communist baggage of *nomenklatura*, war with Armenia and a whole nation clamouring for establishing a distinct 'Azeri' identity. Such a hostile situation was not

much conducive to the political developments in the country. As a result personality based polity took firm roots in the country. People of independent Azerbaijan were concerned with the sole goal of 'Victory in Nagorno-Karabakh'. For the moment, the putting in place of a real democratic set-up least concerned them. Taking advantage of such an ideal situation, people like Huseinov and Aliyev came into prominence by their success in handling the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh. Emotionally charged environment created by the ups and downs on war front in Nagorno-Karabakh guided and propelled the political developments in the country during the period of study.

But the storyline started changing for the better after the end of war in Nagorno-Karabakh. Political elites at the helm of power now diverted their attention to the pressing politico-economic-social aspirations of the country. Of the twin challenges that the new country faced, i.e. nation building and institution building, by late 90s Azerbaijan succeeded to a great extent in the former. As far as the institution building is concerned, a lot needs to be done on that front. The next most important item (first being the Nagorno-Karabakh crisis) on the political agenda of the elites should be institution building in the country. This process of institution building will take the country away from the "personality based deideologised polity" which is the hallmark of Azerbaijan today.

If we compare the democratisation experience of Azerbaijan and that of the East-Central European countries (with almost similar challenges

of nation building and institution building) we find that Azerbaijan has lagged much behind. In their quest to join the western economic (EU) and security (NATO) structures, East-Central European countries went for far reaching changes in their established norms of behaviour (for example, in all these countries minority rights are guaranteed and protected by constitution) which made the transition process a little bit easier (notwithstanding the bloody ethnic conflicts which marked the region). No such incentive came in the way of Azerbaijani democratisation. Western World (OSCE) and Russia took interest in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict only in the initial years of independence. OSCE and Russia played key role in ending the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh. But, Now the West and Russia are taking greater interest in other aspects of Azerbaijani life also.

This awakening of interest in Azerbaijan on the part of West and Russia is not fired by any philanthropic motive but by their own geopolitical and economic consideration. Azerbaijan is strategically located between Russia on the one hand and countries like Iran and Turkey on the other hand. It also controls a sizeable outlet to the Caspian sea. EU and NATO enlargement have now reached the Black Sea. For these bodies, the role of countries like Azerbaijan shall be crucial in getting access to the Caspian sea and making an inroad into West Asia. The 9/11 incident has further enhanced the geopolitical importance of the country. Bordered as it is by Iran and fired as it is by Azeri nationalism based primarily on religion, it can emerge as a probable hotbed of 'Islamic terrorism'. Russia is alarmed at this possibility, because of Volatile situation in Chechnya. The economic,

political and social unrest in the country can be misused by the Islamic fundamentalists to forment anger against West and Russia. Russia and West do not want such situation.

It is because of these geopolitical considerations that the West and the Russia are developing stake in the transition process of Azerbaijan. International Financial institutions like, International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank and International Development Assistance (IDA) are extending helping hand to the Azerbaijani economy. Russia and the western countries too are helping in the process of the stabilisation of Azerbaijani economy. These efforts started paying dividends by late 90s and economy started looking up a little bit. The task of institution building can be accomplished only when economy is well entrenched in comfort. The Second round of political developments, leading to the establishment of a modern democratic order in Azerbaijan in true sense, will begin in the background of economic peace.

The West and Russia are also interested in Azerbaijan because of its huge hydrocarbon resource base. In an age when Western world is looking for alternative to West Asia for Supply source of hydrocarbon, Azerbaijan is counted among one of the peaceful supply sources of energy in the world. Azerbaijan should utilise this advantage to its favour. West and Russia need Azerbaijan as much as Azerbaijan needs them. Azerbaijan should put its energy resources to optimum use in its own

favour. For this, regional cooperation should be encouraged. Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline is a major step in that direction.

A major loophole in the whole process of political development of Azerbaijan has been the lack of a vibrant civil society. Civil Society plays tremendous role in closing the gap between the theory and practice of democracy in a transition country. NGOs, independent media, human rights groups, political think tanks etc. are either missing or controlled by the Government in Azerbaijan. By 1995, development on this front was minimal. But after that, gradually some space is being created for the civil society under western and Russian influence. The political set-up in Azerbaijan today has been implanted from above. The push has not come from the below. It is the responsibility of the civil society to provide the impetus for political development from below.

But civil society can not spring up from thin air. It's the responsibility of the elites there to cultivate and develop space for civil society. And the first step in that direction will be taken when 'civic' nationalism is promoted instead of 'ethnic' nationalism. Ethnic nationalism promotes narrow 'us' versus 'them' approach while civic nationalism lays the foundation of a communitarian approach of 'us' and 'us'.

This is what, Azerbaijan needs today. Promotion of 'civic' nationalism alone can usher Azerbaijan in the modern democratic world.

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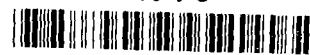
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